ISSUE 181 | AUGUST 2010

DUNGEON

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

ISSUE NO. 181

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DUNGEON®

DUNGEON

181

DUNGEON August 2010

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Treasure a Good DM

The Dungeon Master makes or breaks a campaign.

I don't think that's a shocking statement. The DM isn't the only factor, of course, in whether a campaign succeeds and is enjoyable for everyone involved. Anyone, DM or players, can ruin a campaign by being rude, inattentive, disruptive, or by not showing up. Players by themselves, however, can't make a campaign excellent. They can and must contribute, but when the dice truly hit the table, excellence is in the hands of the DM. No matter how good a team of players might be, it can't cover for a weak DM, but a strong DM is a leader who can make up for and overcome a few weak players.

It's no surprise that a lot of DMs don't cut the mustard. Some were thrust into the position because no one else wanted it or because they owned the rules. Some are too young and immature (or just immature). The really bad ones are power trippers, control freaks, pedants, bores, passive-aggressive backbiters, or possibly worst of all, bullies.

They all want to be excellent DMs, I'm sure. The fact is, it's a hard job. DMing demands writing exciting adventures, handling multiple NPC roles, staging adrenaline-pumping fight scenes, keeping everything organized, and managing players' personalities. Lots of people can do those things. The trick is finding the person who can do all of them, at the same time. It's a bit like finding someone who can paint pictures, fix cars, cook, and throw a football.

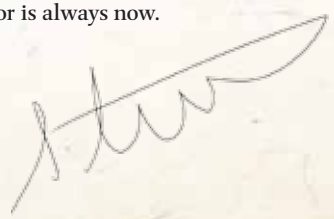
If you've played with a really sterling DM, you know that it's a tough act to follow. They set the bar high, and that in itself is imposing. Who wants to take the chair behind the screen after the world's best DM vacates it?

We like to think that every DUNGEONS & DRAGONS player is an up-and-coming DM. They learn from and emulate the DMs they play under. Sadly, it's easy to emulate a bad DM and pick up all of his or her regrettable techniques; anyone can learn to do something poorly. The opposite is not true; observing an excellent DM will not, by itself, make you one.

That's why it behooves every top-notch DM out there—and you know who you are, even if you're too modest and self-effacing to admit it openly—to act as mentors to those players who show the knack. Don't assume that anyone can just pick this up because it comes naturally to you. 4E encourages DMs to apportion some of the campaign management duties among players. That's a good idea not just because it lightens the DM's load but because it lets players dip their toes into the DM's pool. What better way is there to learn the skills of a DM than by picking them up one at a time? Some possibilities include:

- If a player has a deft hand at keeping track of the party's travels and escapades, put him in charge of recording the world's history, or even of creating some of it.
- If a player has a knack for coming up with interesting characters, arrange some scenes where her character isn't present so she can take over the role of a few NPCs encountered in the street, a shop, or a tavern.
- If a player is an excellent tactician, find an opportunity to let him take charge of some of the monsters in a fight, either because his character is somewhere else or (less fortuitously) KO'd or dying.
- If a player is a talented storyteller, encourage her to try designing an adventure, or just outlining one. The short delve format is ideal for this. If the adventure is good, run it for the group—or take a night off from behind the screen and let this player run it.

Every DM's ideal should be to graduate at least one person, if not more, from the rank of player to Dungeon Master. If you were lucky, someone showed you the way. The time to pass on the favor is always now.



DARK·SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

A Dark Sun adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the searing Tablelands of Athas and challenges the characters to find an ancient treasure lost in this vast desert.

However, the characters are not alone in seeking the long-lost fortune!

HEROIC
1–10

The Vault of Darom Madar

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

illustration by Daarken and Eric Belisle

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The Vault of Darom Madar is a Dark Sun adventure for five 1st-level characters. It takes place in the Tablelands beyond the alluvial sand wastes. The adventure challenges the characters to find an ancient treasure lost somewhere in the vast desert. The characters, however, are not the only group seeking to uncover the long-lost fortune, so the heroes must not only find the treasure but return safely with it to the gates of Tyr. *The Vault of Darom Madar* provides enough experience to take characters to 3rd level at the adventure's conclusion.

Background

There is bitter and often bloody rivalry between the great merchant houses plying their trades within the vast city states of the Tyr region. The often unscrupulous members of these hereditary merchant consortiums sell anything and everything from food, water, and other survival essentials to humanoid slaves fit for serving in a noble estate or fighting and dying in the arena.

Occasionally, two merchant houses become successful and wealthy selling the same goods. This usually leads to a bloody war between houses for control of the commodity in question. So it was centuries ago with houses Madar and Tsalaxa. Both houses controlled the majority of the livestock trade in the Tablelands, where they dealt in the finest specimens of erdlu, kank, and mekillot. House Madar, led by the clever and even-tempered Darom Madar, was content to share the marketplace with their primary competitor. Virinus Tsalaxa, a twisted defiler and elder of House Tsalaxa, was not about to share the wealth with anyone.

Determined to control the livestock trade absolutely, House Tsalaxa used a large portion of its considerable wealth to hire skilled assassins. House Madar was completely unprepared for such aggression, and by the time it managed to organize even a semblance of defense, half their number had been methodically exterminated. By destroying House Madar, Virinus Tsalaxa eliminated his sole competition in the livestock trade. He hoped to go beyond that and gain control of House Madar's considerable wealth.

Even though Darom Madar could not prevent Virinus from accomplishing his first goal, the leader of House Madar was dead set on preventing his villainous rival from accomplishing the second.

Mobilizing what remained of his house, Darom Madar had every bit of material wealth taken from the Madar Estate and hidden in a deep vault in the Canyon of Guthay. Soon after, Tsalaxa assassins killed Darom Madar and everyone else of his house, and his line ended. Knowledge of the secret treasure vault's location in the Canyon of Guthay died with House Madar and has remained a secret over the centuries ... until now, that is.

Synopsis

The Vault of Darom Madar begins just after *Sand Raiders*, the short adventure provided in the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, ends. This adventure consists of three parts. By the end of the third act, the characters should have earned enough experience to reach 3rd level.

The adventure begins in Altaruk. After successfully retrieving the valuable cargo for Rhotan Vor, head of the Wavir tradepost in Altaruk, the characters are given the opportunity to search for the lost treasure of House Madar. The scant clues of the treasure's location point to the Canyon of Guthay, a massive rift on the edge of the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes. More clues to the treasure's whereabouts and information about the canyon can be found at Silver Spring but must be pried from the tight-lipped elves who guard that place. The trek to Silver Springs takes the characters across the Tablelands and pits them against the desert's many dangers, including a band of mysterious assassins far more determined than simple desert raiders.

The second part of the adventure sends the characters into the Canyon of Guthay armed with information from the elves or only their own bravery. The Canyon of Guthay is a dark and forlorn place riddled with shallow, monster-infested caverns which hold many dangers for the characters. One of Guthay's caverns holds the lost vault of Darom Madar, a place that is half treasure vault and half mausoleum. Here the characters must battle what remains of House Madar itself–undead horrors animated by centuries-old hatred–defeat a number of ghoulish traps, and finally win their way into the treasure vault.

The last part of the adventure challenges the treasure-laden characters to make the arduous trip across the Alluvial Sand Wastes to the great city of Tyr. During the journey, the characters are beset by monstrous horrors native to the Athasian wilds and another group of mysterious assassins who are eventually revealed to be operatives of House Tsalaxa, House Madar's ancient enemy.

Hooks

There is really only one primary hook in this adventure, and it revolves around the Wavir trademaster Rhotan Vor. While the characters are in Altaruk, Rhotan Vor approaches them with a proposition that could make them very wealthy. Impressed with the skill the characters displayed in locating and recovering the missing Wavir wagon and its goods, Rhotan believes the heroes are up for a real challenge.

Although this is the primary motivation for the characters, a number of minor hooks described below can give the characters more reason to travel with Rhotan Vor and seek out the treasure of Darom Madar. You can use one or both of the minor hooks, each corresponding to minor quests, to make the search for House Madar's lost treasure even more compelling.

Primary Quest: Lost Treasure

Rhotan has recently come into possession of some very valuable information. In Balic, he encountered a drunken human in a seedy tavern who claimed to be a descendant of Darom Madar, the last elder of the long-dead Madar merchant house. In addition, the man claimed to know the location of Darom Madar's treasure vault, which he offered to Rhotan for the sum of 30 gp. Rhotan is no fool, but 30 gp seemed a small price to pay for what could be the location of one of the greatest lost treasures of Athas.

Although the man did not know the exact location of the treasure vault, he told Rhotan that it lay within the Canyon of Guthay near the alluvial sand wastes in the Tablelands east of Tyr. The vault is rumored to contain vast wealth, from metal coins, armor, and weapons to priceless artifacts dating from Athas' more verdant past.

Rhotan asks the characters to search the Canyon of Guthay and ascertain if the vault exists. If it does, it undoubtedly holds more wealth than the characters can hope to carry away themselves. Therefore, Rhotan offers the characters their pick of any treasure the vault may contain plus a 10 percent share once the remainder of the goods and artifacts are sold in Tyr, Rhotan's next destination.

Rhotan and his caravan travel with the characters, although they do not aid the characters in combat. Rhotan and his men will not enter the Canyon of Guthay until the characters have found the vault and cleared any threats to their safety.

Quest XP: 625 (major quest) finding the vault of Darom Madar.

Minor Quest 1: Elven Relations

The first leg of the adventure takes the characters across the Tablelands to the oasis of Silver Springs. This oasis has long been guarded by the Silver Hand elves led by their chieftain Toramund.

While in Altaruk, the characters are approached by an elven woman named Iseel who claims to be a relative of the fearsome Silver Hand chieftain. She says she has information about the chieftain's son but refuses to tell the characters what this information entails. Iseel asks the characters to deliver a message to Toramund. The message is written in an elven code that is nearly impossible to crack. If the characters agree to deliver the message, Iseel pays them 10 gp and tells them her brother Isann, a trader at Silver Springs, will pay them a further 10 gp and one day's worth of food and water per character when they complete the task.

The characters can try to decipher the elven code and read the message if they choose. In fact, doing so can give them an edge when negotiating with Toramund in Silver Spring.

Quest XP: 250 (minor quest) deliver Iseel's message to Toramund.

Cracking the Code Skill Challenge

Level: 1 (XP 200)

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Perception, Thievery.

Perception (DC 12; 1 hour per attempt; 1 success, no maximum): Your keen eyes and mind make it easy to spot patterns and puzzle out a portion of the elven code.

Thievery (DC 12; 1 hour per attempt; 1 success, no maximum): You're no stranger to secret messages and cyphers, even those of the elves.

Secondary Skills: Insight, Nature, Language

Insight (DC 17; 1 hour per attempt, no successes, 3 maximum): You are adept at detecting suggested meanings, and although there is no speaker present, some of this skill translates to the written word. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Perception or Thievery check made as part of this skill challenge.

Nature (DC 17; 1 hour per attempt, no successes, 3 maximum): Elven code often includes metaphors relating to the natural world, your knowledge of which allows you to pick up on subtle clues. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Perception or Thievery check made as part of this skill challenge.

Language (Special, no successes):
If no one in the group speaks Elven, all skill checks made in this encounter receive a -1 penalty. If the entire group speaks elven, all skill checks receive a +1 bonus.

Success: The characters decipher the message, which reads:

Toramund, your son is in grave danger. His criminal activities in Tyr have drawn the attention of the Toothcutters, and they have little patience with freelance thieves. I know you have not spoken with Ravee in many years, but if you do nothing, he is certainly doomed.

This information gives the characters a valuable bargaining chip when dealing with Toramund in the "Negotiating with Toramund" skill challenge (See Encounter 1-3: An Audience with Toramund).

Failure: The characters fail to decipher the message. If they achieved more than two successes before failing at the challenge, then tell them that they were able to make out some of it but not all. From what they can gather, someone named Ravee has been killed by the Toothcutters, but they can't determine why or who Ravee was. This is not true, of course, and using this information in the "Negotiating with Toramund" skill challenge can have disastrous results (See Encounter 1-3: An Audience with Toramund).

Minor Quest 2: Crimson Sand

Bandits are a constant danger on the trade routes between the various pockets of civilization in the Tablelands. These bandits strike mercilessly and slay entire caravans for the valuables and water they carry. In Altaruk, a bounty has been posted for a particularly vicious gang of bandits, the Crimson Vipers, who have taken up residence at an oasis between the Altaruk and Silver Spring. A reward of 50 gp is offered to any who kill the bandits or drive them from the oasis. The reward can be claimed by delivering proof of the deed to Arisphistaneles in Altaruk or to Chief Toramund in Silver Springs. The bandits wind crimson sashes around their waists as a badge.

Quest XP: 250 (minor quest) for slaying the Crimson Vipers.

Getting Ready to Play

In addition to familiarizing yourself with the monster stat blocks and maps in *The Vault of Darom Madar*, you should read up on the Tablelands and the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes in the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*. Your players may have questions about these regions and their inhabitants. The *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* offers a wealth of information on both regions, and the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog* details dozens of monsters and other foes native to the areas.

Treasure Preparation

The following treasure parcels are available in *The Vault of Darom Madar*.

TREASURE PARCELS

Parcel	Location	Contents
1	Crimson Oasis	Two *potion fruits of healing* + 80 gp
2	Wasteland Assassins	One level 2 magic item
3	Cavern of Eternal Conflict	One level 4 magic item
4	Crypt of Sorrow	One 250 gp art object + 80 gp
5	The Treasure of Darom Madar	Special (See Encounter)
6	Assassin Ambush	80 gp + 1 survival day of food and water per character
7	Silken Surprise	Three *potion fruits of healing*
8	The Terror of Tsalaxa	One level 6 magic item

In addition to the treasure parcels listed above, feel free to award treasure parcels in the optional combat encounters presented throughout this adventure. See the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* for details on Athas-specific treasures.

What the Characters Know

Before the characters set out to find the treasure of House Madar, you can tell them what they know about the fallen merchant house and its bitter rivalry with House Tsalaxa. A character knows the following with a successful skill check.

History DC 6: House Madar was once a successful merchant operation involved in the livestock trade. It was crushed in a trade war against its rival, House Tsalaxa, over a hundred years ago. House Tsalaxa is still an active merchant house and has all but cornered the livestock trade in the Tablelands.

History DC 12: House Madar was not crushed by competition but wiped out by hired assassins in the pay of House Tsalaxa. It is rumored that the head of House Madar, Darom, hid their vast wealth somewhere in the Tablelands before the destruction of his house was complete. With no living descendants, the location of the treasure–if it ever even existed–is lost to time.

History DC 18: A dark legend states that many House Madar elders, including Darom Madar himself, were sealed into a hidden vault along with the treasure. The legend further states that Darom and those buried with him stand eternal vigil against any who would defile their tomb.

Rhotan's Caravan

Rhotan's caravan consists of three sand skiffs (see the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* for more details on these vehicles). Rhotan's group consists of himself, two sand skiff pilots, and six deckhands (two per sand skiff). Rhotan pilots one of the skiffs himself.

Rhotan and his crew are not warriors; they expect the characters to do all the fighting (although this fact might change; see "Treasure Chamber" for alternatives). In fact, for the first leg of the adventure, the trek to Silver Spring, Rhotan expects the characters to scout a full day ahead and deal with whatever danger the desert presents before the caravan can run afoul of it. In addition, the caravan does not enter the Canyon of Guthay until the characters have found the vault of Darom Madar and given the all clear.

In the third act of the adventure, things change a bit. Laden with treasure, Rhotan keeps the heroes close to the caravan on the journey to Tyr. The characters must not only defend themselves from the dangers of the Athasian wilderness, they must ensure that Rhotan and his crew survive.

The Great Road

Before the characters leave Altaruk, Rhotan Vor informs them that the elven chieftain Toramund at Silver Springs may have valuable information about the Canyon of Guthay. In addition, Silver Springs is an excellent place to stop and resupply. There are many dangers between Altaruk and Silver Spring, however.

This part of the adventure features two unavoidable combat encounters and three others that the characters can avoid if they are careful. Run the "Across the Tablelands" skill challenge between each of the two set encounters. Failing the skill challenge places environmental obstacles and more combat encounters in the caravan's way to drain resources and leave them less prepared for the next combat encounter. You will run the skill challenge a total of three times, in this sequence:

1. Caravan leaves Altaruk
2. "Across the Tablelands" skill challenge
3. Encounter 1-1: Crimson Oasis
4. "Across the Tablelands" Skill Challenge
5. Encounter 1-2: Wasteland Assassins
6. "Across the Tablelands" Skill Challenge
7. Caravan arrives in Silver Springs

The primary skill checks in this challenge are group skill checks. If at least half of the characters succeed on their rolls in a group skill check, the party earns 1 success in that primary skill. Secondary skill checks are attempted individually, by one character in the group once per group skill check. In addition, the characters must earn at least one success on all three primary group skill checks to complete the skill challenge.

The length of time involved in this trip is left intentionally vague. You should decide how long you want the trip to the canyon to take based on the pacing of your game and where you decide to place the Canyon of Guthay on your campaign map.

Across the Tablelands Skill Challenge

Level: 1 (XP 100)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Endurance, Perception, Stealth

Special: Success in the skill challenge requires 4 successful primary skill checks. Each of the three primary skills must be used at least once, in any order, before any of them can be attempted a second time. After that, they can be used in any mix and order the players choose.

Endurance (DC 10, group check; 1 success): Your group is tough enough to survive even the relentless heat of the Athasian sun.

Perception (DC 10, group check; 1 success): Keen eyes and direction sense keep you headed in the right direction.

Stealth (DC 10, group check; 1 success): Dangers abound in the Athasian wilderness, but they can be avoided if your group is quick and quiet.

Secondary Skills: Bluff, Heal, Nature

Special: If a primary skill check earns a failure for the group, then one character can use one of these secondary skills in an attempt to convert that failure into a success.

Bluff (DC 13; 0 successes, 1 attempt per primary skill group check): By creating a diversion that keeps hostile humanoids and monsters from noticing your group, you convert a single character's failed Stealth check into a success as part of the Stealth primary group skill check.

Heal (DC 10; 0 successes, 1 attempt per primary skill group check): By treating the emerging symptoms of heat exhaustion and sun sickness before they become debilitating, you convert a single character's

failed Endurance check into a success as part of the Endurance primary group skill check.

Nature (DC 13; 0 successes, 1 attempt per primary skill group check): By carefully navigating the harsh Athasian wilderness and avoiding its worst flora and fauna, you convert a single character's failed Perception check into a success as part of the Perception primary group skill check.

Success: The characters reach the next encounter unharmed and intact. They have had ample time to rest and have maximum hit points and all powers available to them.

Failure: Group failure (not individual failure) at a primary skill check has the following results.

Endurance: Each time the group as a whole fails at this skill check, every character who failed the Endurance check individually is exposed to sun sickness (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting* page 199).

Perception: Each time the group as a whole fails at this skill check, every character who failed the Perception check individually gains a cumulative -1 penalty to all subsequent Perception checks made as part of this skill challenge.

Stealth: If the group as a whole fails at this skill check, they have a combat encounter with one of the desert's many dangerous inhabitants. Choose and run one of the following optional encounters.

Optional Encounters

These encounters can be run when the characters fail the Stealth group challenge in the "Across the Tablelands" skill challenge. Assemble a typical desert battlefield quickly with the *Desert of Athas* Dungeon Tiles or sketch one on your battlemat. It should include sandy stretches and rocks but little in the way of vegetation or water.

Although these encounters are designed to be part of the skill challenge, don't feel obligated to run them if the characters are already having a tough enough time with the two planned encounters or you want to move things quickly to Guthay Canyon. If the characters are breezing through the skill challenges and fights, consider beefing up the foes with some of these encounter groups.

Baazrag Swarm

Encounter Level 2 (XP 600)

2 baazrag gnawers
2 baazrag swarms
4 baazrag whelps

The characters stumble upon a baazrag burrow. The voracious beasts come boiling up out of the ground when the heroes disturb their lair. It is unlikely that the baazrags will surprise the characters, as they make an awful racket of clicking and squealing as they exit their burrows to attack.

The baazrags use gang up on heroes to take advantage of *pack harrier*. The gnawers attempt to latch onto a character immediately and use gnaw to inject their poison. The baazrag swarms attempt to knock a character off his or her feet with *pull down*, then flow over their prone victim and tear him or her to pieces. The baazrag whelps focus their attacks on any character engaged with a gnawer and or knocked prone by a baazrag swarm. The baazrags fight relentlessly and to the death.

Silt Runner Surprise

Encounter Level 1 (XP 525)

2 silt runner darters
1 silt runner inciter
2 silt runner ragers

A small group of silt runners try to ambush the characters. The silt runners have a passive Stealth check of 17 and hide in an area with plenty of cover such as dense scrub or a boulder field.

If the silt runners surprise the characters, they use their surprise round as follows. The darters fire *poison darts* at characters with bows or javelins; the inciter blasts the characters with *psionic detonation*, attempting to catch as many characters as possible in the blast; and the ragers charge the closest characters and engage them in melee. As battle continues, the darters remain out of melee range, instead peppering the heroes with *poison darts* as often as the power recharges. The ragers use *penetrating spear* immediately and stay close to one another so their foes take damage from *silt runner swarm*. The inciter enters melee with its bone sword until *psionic detonations* recharges; it then shifts away from melee and targets as many characters as it can catch in the blast. The silt runners fight to the death.

Elven Entourage

Encounter Level 1 (XP 525)

2 elf dune striders
1 elf peddler
4 elf snipers

An elven trader and his bodyguards decide the characters make better victims than customers. The elf peddler greets the characters as he and his group approach. He attempts to dupe the characters into believing they are simple desert traders. Give the characters an Insight check opposed by the peddler's Bluff check. If the characters fail to see through the elven ruse, the elves gain a surprise round on them. Of course, the players are always free to be suspicious without a die roll and take steps to avoid being caught

off-guard. Likewise, if the players show no caution at all, you're well within your authority as DM to give them no Insight check.

If the elves surprise the characters, the elf peddler and dune striders charge forward and engage the characters in melee. The snipers hang back and hurl their chatkchas at obvious spellcasters. As the battle continues, the elf peddler uses *double dealing* and *peddler's command* to maneuver itself and the dune striders into flanking positions against the characters. When bloodied, the dune striders use *rushing dervish* to carve their way through the heroes and gain a more advantageous position on the battlefield. The elf snipers avoid melee combat at all costs. Instead, they use *elven misdirection* to move behind cover before making ranged attacks with their chatkchas.

The elves do not fight to the death. If the characters slay more than half their number and bloody the elf peddler, the elves flee if they can. If they can't, they throw down their weapons and beg for mercy.

Crimson Oasis

Halfway between Altaruk and Silver Spring lies a small, nameless oasis that is little more than a muddy pool in a shallow, sandy depression. This humble oasis has long served as an important way station for travelers making the dangerous trip across the Tablelands. Recently, bandits calling themselves the Crimson Vipers have taken up residence at the oasis and have been mercilessly killing and robbing desert travelers who stop there.

The Crimson Vipers are led by Drokan, a dwarven priest, and his longtime companion in villainy, a halfling wilder named Yassi. The rest of the gang consists of three human warriors, all of whom are considered expendable by Drokan and Yassi.

Knowing how vital the oasis is to desert travelers, the Crimson Vipers typically let their victims come to them. When an approaching dust cloud is spotted, Yassi ranges out to scout the approaching travelers and gauge their strength. Large, well-armed caravans are left unmolested, and the bandits make themselves scarce while such unattainable prey uses the oasis. Smaller groups are ambushed, murdered, stripped of valuables, and then buried in the desert.

The approaching characters fall into the latter group.

The characters can avoid walking into an ambush if they spot Yassi before they reach the oasis. The characters can spot the halfling wilder while he observes them from a nearby hiding spot place. Yassi remains at least 20 squares away from the approaching characters while observing them and uses natural cover for concealment. His passive Stealth check is 19; at a range of 20 squares, however, the characters need a Perception check of 23 to spot the hidden halfling. If the characters see Yassi, he immediately springs up and sprints back to the oasis to warn Drokan. If the heroes fail to spot him, he lets them pass by, then sneaks back to the oasis to join in the ambush.

If the characters spot Yassi, read:

Sudden movement among the rolling dunes ahead catches your eye. A small, lithe form springs up from behind a low dune and races off to the north, away from your group.

Once the characters reach the oasis, the Crimson Vipers are ready for them, hiding in the sparse scrub around the muddy pool. The bandits have a passive Stealth check of 11. If the characters spotted Yassi before reaching the oasis, give them a +2 bonus to all Perception checks made to spot the hiding bandits.

When the characters approach the oasis, read:

Calling this muddy hole in the ground surrounded by desert scrub an oasis is an overstatement. However, even muddy, foul-tasting water is welcome relief from the desert. Before you can contemplate your first sip, the oasis erupts into violent action as three armed men burst from cover and charge toward you.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 1-1: Crimson Oasis.**

Wasteland Assassins

The characters' quest to find the treasure of House Madar has not gone unnoticed. House Tsalaxa, now led by Virinus' descendant Haneth Tsalaxa, has learned through its vast network of spies that a group of heroes is searching for the lost vault of Darom Madar. Unwilling to let the wealth of his house's ancient enemy fall into the hands of simple adventurers, Haneth has followed in his ancestor's footsteps and hired a group of assassins to deal with the characters and recover any information they may have on the location of House Madar's treasure.

The assassins' first attempt on the characters' lives happens during the heroes' trek across the Tablelands to Silver Spring. The assassins, led by a twisted defiler, ambush the characters in an area of rolling dunes and trackless wasteland. The squad of assassins consists of the defiler, three elven snipers, and the defiler's crodlu mount.

The assassins stage their ambush at the top of a series of boulder-strewn dunes. The dunes and the boulders provide excellent cover and force the characters to move up the dune to engage the assassins. The elven assassins lie prone atop boulders waiting for the characters to come within range of their bows while the defiler and his crodlu kneel behind one of the

small dunes. The group has a passive Stealth check of 21. Once they spot the characters, the assassins unleash a volley of ranged attacks on the heroes.

When the assassins attack, read the following aloud:

The desert is a ceaseless blur of sun-scorched sand and rolling dunes. There is little to break the draining monotony of heat and thirst that plagues all desert travelers. When the barbed arrows begin hissing from the sky, fired by a trio of dark shapes on the crest of a nearby dune, it is almost a welcome break to the drudgery of travel.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 1-2: Wasteland Assassins**.

Silver Spring Oasis

Silver Spring oasis has long stood as a vital stop on the trade route between Urik and Tyr. Its longevity in a desert filled with dangerous monsters and brutal bandits is a testament to the skill of the Silver Hand elves who have guarded the fortified oasis for generations. Silver Spring oasis consists of a walled caravanserai within which stands the "Silver Spring," the source of the oasis's water and name. Doors along the inner walls lead to sleeping chambers, a common room, food stores, stables, and vaults where traders can safely store their merchandise.

The characters' goal here is to meet with the elven chieftain Toramund. The elves are known to have quite a bit of desert lore, and Rhotan Vor believes Toramund can tell them much about the dangers that infest the Canyon of Guthay. In addition to any information they may gain, Silver Spring is an ideal place to rest and resupply before heading back out into the desert.

Gaining an audience with Toramund is not easy. The elves are not fond of traders beyond what they come to sell and buy, and Toramund only meets with those he considers important enough to warrant his attention. If the characters agreed to deliver Iseel's message to the elven leader, they have an excellent way to gain Toramund's attention. All they need to do is mention Iseel's name and that they bear a message from her, and they are whisked through a bewildering array of passages beneath Silver Spring and into Toramund's presence. Getting the elven chieftain to tell them anything is another matter entirely.

An Audience with Toramund

The characters' attempt to bargain for information from the elven chieftain Toramund can be handled as a pure roleplaying encounter or as a roleplaying skill challenge.

Elves are notoriously tough negotiators; getting them to part with anything, be it information or merchandise, is a long, grueling experience not wisely undertaken by the faint of heart. In addition, Toramund has risen to his current position by being one of the shrewdest negotiators on the Tablelands.

In other words, the characters have their work cut out for them.

If the characters have Iseel's message for Toramund and have decrypted its elven cypher, they can gain an edge in the negotiations with Toramund. If the characters decided not to deliver Iseel's message, they must bribe their way into Toramund's presence. A bribe of five survival days' worth of food and water (or the equivalent) is enough to earn them an audience with Toramund. This amount can be reduced to three survival days with a successful Diplomacy check (DC 17) on the elf in charge of who does and doesn't gain access to Toramund. (Presumably, he will keep most of the bribe for himself.) Let players come up with this idea on their own or hint at it only broadly in their encounter with the guard.

Regardless of how the characters get to Toramund, when they are brought to his secret meeting chamber beneath Silver Spring, **read the following aloud:**

Your elven guide leads you through a bewildering array of narrow passages that seem to slope ever downward. You were promised an audience with the chieftain Toramund, and as you wind deeper into the labyrinth, you realize you would never had reached him on your own. You may not be able to find your way out again without guide. Finally, you stop before a curtained aperture in a narrow tunnel from which the soft glow of firelight emanates. Your guide pushes the curtain aside and motions for you to enter.

Beyond the curtain, a small, square room holds a single elven man sitting cross-legged on the earthen floor on a woven matt. Like all elves he is long-limbed and rangy, but this elf has a physical presence that most elves lack. An unsheathed obsidian longsword lies casually on the floor just inches from his hand. The elven man fixes you with steel-blue eyes and says, "Here I am. Now what do you fools want?"

The elven man is Toramund, of course. The characters might find it odd that this important leader chose to meet them alone. However, a DC 12 Insight check reveals this is meant as an insult. Toramund considers their abilities so far beneath his own that he doesn't consider the newcomers any threat. If the characters have Iseel's message, they can give it to Toramund now. As he reads it, give the characters an Insight check against Toramund's Bluff check (DC 20) to realize the contents of the letter have affected the elven leader greatly. At this point, if the characters deciphered the message (or think they did), they can try to gain an advantage over Toramund.

If the characters correctly deciphered Iseel's message, they can offer their services to the elven leader. For example, since the characters' ultimate destination is Tyr, they can offer to seek out Toramund's son Ravee and deliver a message to him once they get there. An offer like this earns the characters a modicum of respect and grants them a +1 bonus to all skill checks in the "Negotiating with Toramund" skill challenge. In addition, you can use Ravee's plight in Tyr as a hook for further adventure in the great city.

If the characters deciphered Iseel's message incorrectly and offer their condolences on the death of Toramund's son, he curses them as fools and is offended that they would try to read a message meant for his eyes only. In this scenario, the characters gain a -1 penalty to all skill checks made in the "Negotiating with Toramund" skill challenge.

If the characters did not agree to deliver Iseel's message or simply do not think to use the information in the message, then run the skill challenge without bonuses or penalties.

The characters are under no obligation to tell Toramund why they intend to enter the Canyon of Guthay. If they do tell him they seek the lost treasure of House Madar, Toramund laughs and sardonically wishes them the best of luck. Toramund believes House Madar's treasure is no more than a desert wisp, and thinks the characters foolish, insane, or both for undertaking such a ridiculous quest.

Negotiating with Toramund

Level 2 (XP 500)

Complexity: 4 (requires 10 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy

Bluff (DC 13; standard action; 1 success, no maximum): You use your quick mind and silver tongue to exaggerate your group's abilities in an attempt to impress the elven chieftain.

Diplomacy (DC 13; standard action; 1 success, no maximum): You are a skilled negotiator, and you match your skills well against the shrewd elven chieftain.

Secondary Skills: Endurance, Insight, Intimidate, Nature

Endurance (DC 12; standard action; 1 success maximum): The elves admire physical endurance. You relate a tale of a grueling physical obstacle your group has overcome recently.

Insight (DC 15; standard action; 0 successes): Reading Toramund's body language is no easy task, but if you pay close attention, the elven chieftain has a few tells that, once identified, can aid your negotiations. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Buff or Diplomacy check made as part of this skill challenge.

Intimidate (standard action; 1 failure): Any attempt to intimidate Toramund automatically fails and earns

the characters a failure and a -1 penalty to all further skill checks made in the skill challenge. Toramund simply does not view the characters as a threat.

Nature (DC 12; standard action; 1 success, 1 maximum): Elves respect those who understand the wilds of Athas. You relate some of your knowledge of the natural world in an attempt to impress Toramund.

Success: Toramund tells the characters what he knows about the dangers of the Canyon of Guthay. This knowledge gains them the following benefits, depending on how many failures they earned before completing the skill challenge.

0 Failures: So skilled were the characters in their negotiations that they managed to impress Toramund, and he tells them all he knows about the Canyon of Guthay. The elven chieftain's detailed information grants them a +2 bonus to all skill checks in the "Exploring the Canyon" skill challenge in Part 2 and allows them to turn one failure into a success. Furthermore, Toramund is so impressed with their drive that he charges them only two survival days of food and water for the information.

1 Failure: The characters did not embarrass themselves in the negotiation. They gain a +1 bonus on skill checks in the "Exploring the Canyon" skill challenge in Part 2. The characters are charged three survival days of food and water (or the equivalent) for this information.

2 Failures: The characters emerge from negotiating with Toramund looking diminished and foolish, but they got some of what they wanted from the wily chieftain. They gain no bonus or penalty on skill checks in the "Exploring the Canyon" skill challenge in Part 2. The characters are charged five survival days of food and water (or the equivalent) for the scraps that Toramund revealed.

Failure: If the characters fail this skill challenge, they only confirm Toramund's original assessment of them as weak, foolish outsiders. He gives them only the scantest details about the Canyon of Guthay, which they probably could have gotten from anyone at the oasis. This enables them to find the canyon without incident. If, however, the characters tried to Intimidate Toramund at any point, then he fed them false information along with the rest, and it will lead them directly into danger. In this case, the first time the characters earn a failure in the "Exploring the Canyon" skill challenge and blunder into a combat encounter, they are automatically surprised.

The Canyon of Guthay

Armed with the knowledge bought from Toramund at Silver Spring, the characters can travel to the Canyon of Guthay and begin searching in earnest for the lost treasure of House Madar. The walls of the canyon are riddled with caverns, any of which could hold the lost vault. The others hold only dust or, as often as not, serve as the lair of dangerous desert monsters and humanoids.

The Canyon of Guthay combines the features of a true canyon and a massive rift. Some immense tectonic disturbance in the dim past caused the floor of the canyon to subside about a hundred feet below the level of the surrounding terrain, while the rocky walls were heaved upward by the same amount. The result is a canyon that is twice as deep as it appears from a distance when one can see only the massive upheaval of bedrock around it. A trail winds down through tumbled boulders to the canyon's floor, which is a stretch of relatively smooth sand and gravel that varies from 30 to 90 feet wide along its half-mile length. The walls of the canyon are rough and fairly easy to climb, requiring a DC 10 Athletics check.

Wagons can be brought down the trail into the canyon, but it's a difficult, exhausting trek. Instead, while the characters search the canyon, Rhotan Vor and his caravan wait in a rock-sheltered location about a mile away. The trader expects the characters to find the vault and clear out any dangerous monsters before he and his men descend into the canyon to help ferry up the treasure. If the characters have not returned by the end of three days, Rhotan Vor will assume the worst and return to Silver Spring. He waits there for another three days before giving up the characters for dead and continuing on to Tyr. None of this is a secret; Rhotan Vor tells the characters that this is his timetable.

Run the "Exploring the Canyon" skill challenge to cover the character's search for the cavern that houses the vault.

The primary skill checks in this challenge are group skill checks. If at least half of the characters succeed on their rolls in a group skill check, the party earns 1 success in that primary skill. Secondary skill checks are attempted individually, by one character in the group once per group skill check. In addition, the characters must earn at least two successes in both primary group skill checks to complete the skill challenge.

Exploring the Canyon Skill Challenge

Level: 3 (XP 450)

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 success before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: History, Perception

History (DC 13, group check; 1 success): By compiling all you have learned about the Canyon of Guthay and the possible location of the treasure of House Madar, you can narrow down the number of possible caverns which might hold the hidden treasure vault.

Perception (DC 13, group check; 1 success): Your keen eyes help your group locate caverns that seem more likely to hold the vault of Darom Madar rather than serve as the lair for some desert monstrosity.

Secondary Skills: Athletics, Nature, Stealth

Athletics (DC 13; 0 successes, 1 attempt per primary skill group check): Some of the caverns you wish to explore are high up on the canyon wall. Your athletic ability allows you to climb up and take a peek at such caverns before your entire group follows. You convert a single character's failed History or Perception check into a success as part of a History or Perception primary skill group check.

Nature (DC 13; 0 successes, 1 attempt per primary skill group check): Your knowledge of the natural world helps you notice the telltale signs that a cavern is inhabited by living creatures. You convert a single character's failed History or Perception check into a success as part of a History or Perception primary skill group check.

Stealth (DC 15, group check; 1 attempt per primary skill group check): This cavern holds no treasure, only death for those unlucky enough to disturb its occupants. The characters can make this group skill check when they earn a failure in either of the primary group skill checks. If the characters succeed, they don't cancel that failure but they do avoid detection by the cavern's inhabitants. They can either sneak away without a fight or gain a surprise round on the monsters.

Success: The characters find the vault of Darom Madar cleverly hidden in a natural cavern near the base of the canyon wall.

Failure: Every time the characters earn a failure from a primary skill group check, they trigger one of the optional encounters below or another chosen by you. In addition, each failure represents the passage of one day in the canyon. If the skill challenge as a whole ends in failure, the characters have wasted three days in searching and Rhotan Vor withdraws to Silver Spring. To keep searching, they must start the skill challenge over again from the beginning. If the skill challenge fails a second time, enough time has passed that Rhotan Vor assumes the characters have died and heads for Tyr. Characters can continue searching and may eventually find the vault (if thirst or monsters don't claim them first), but you will need to decide how subsequent events unfold with Rhotan Vor out of the picture.

Optional Encounters

These condensed encounters can be run when the characters earn a failure in the "Exploring the Canyon" skill challenge. These encounters occur within one of the many caverns in Guthay Canyon. Feel free to run them on the canyon floor for variety. You can use the *Caves of Carnage* or *Desert of Athas* Dungeon Tiles to quickly create an encounter area.

Although they are designed to be part of the skill challenge, these encounters are optional. They can be an ideal way to give the characters a bit more experience if you'd like them to gain a level before entering the vault of Darom Madar. You might even run one or more of these encounters specifically for that reason regardless of how well the characters perform in the skill challenge, or just to break up the routine of searching caverns. Additional encounters can be put together from the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, or entirely different types of encounters can replace those listed below—possibilities include an ancient burial chamber, slave refugees, a shaft leading to the Underdark, a quick side trek adapted from *Dungeon Delve* or a *Chaos Scar* adventure, or even a lifesaving trickle of red, alkaline water if the characters are at death's door.

Ankheg Lair

Encounter Level 3 (XP 750)

2 ankhegs

6 ankheg broodlings

This cavern is occupied by a pair of ankhegs and their brood. When the characters enter this cavern, the adult ankhegs are lurking beneath the cavern floor. Only some of the broodlings are on the surface; roll 1d6 to determine how many. Although the adult ankhegs are impossible to spot hidden beneath the ground, a successful monster knowledge check (Nature, DC 10) made on the visible broodlings can tell the characters that danger lurks belowground and keep them from being surprised.

Hejkin Cavern

Encounter Level 2 (XP 675)

1 hejkin chanter
3 hejkin sparkers
2 kruthik young

This cavern is inhabited by a small band of hejkin. This particular band has tamed a pair of young kruthik to serve as watch beasts. The kruthiks are positioned at the mouth of the cave so they can detect approaching enemies with their tremorsense. This makes this particular group of monsters fairly difficult to surprise. The cavern contains 5 survival days worth of food and water.

Gith Lair

Encounter Level 3 (XP 726)

2 gith hobblers
4 gith piercers
1 gith spearhead

This cavern is occupied by a handful of renegade gith. The repulsive humanoids are not particularly observant, although they typically post a single gith piercer near the mouth of their cavern as a sentry. The gith piercer has a passive Perception score of only 12. If the sentry does notice the characters approaching or climbing into the cavern, it spends a minor action to howl an alarm before scuttling back into the cavern to join the rest of its tribe. If it can be eliminated silently, characters can automatically gain surprise against the remaining gith. The cavern contains 7 survival days worth of food and water.

ANTECHAMBER

The vault of Darom Madar is hidden within a natural cavern near the base of the canyon wall. It has remained unplundered by the denizens of the Canyon of Guthay largely because it is guarded by the restless dead of House Madar.

Darom Madar himself was there to oversee the final transfer of his house's wealth into the vault. In addition, he had the vault constructed to house the bodies of those in his immediate family who had been slain by the attacks of House Tsalaxa. Before Darom and what remained of his house could seal the vault, a group of house Tsalaxa assassins attacked. The battle was fierce, and most of it took place in the natural cavern outside the vault. Darom himself was sorely wounded, but he managed to retreat into the vault and then make his way to the treasure chamber, where he died.

The intense hatred and violence of that final conflict between House Madar and House Tsalaxa had an unexpected effect. It animated the dead of both houses, condemning their lifeless flesh and trapped souls to serve as eternal guardians for the vault for the rest of eternity. These undead guardians attack anyone or anything foolish enough to enter the cavern that holds the vault.

This cavern was the scene of a heated battle, and the remnants of that battle are strewn about the place. Over one hundred years ago, what remained of House Madar battled a group of House Tsalaxa assassins. The battle claimed the lives of everyone involved, and the intense hatred borne of the battle has reanimated the dead as zombies and skeletons.

The leader of the House Tsalaxa assassins dabbled in defiler magic and was animated as a dread black reaver zombie. His lieutenant and minions followed their leader's path to undeath and were animated as zombies in his service.

The leader of House Madar's forces was a lesser scion of the Madar line and was an accomplished archer and swordsman. He and his men returned to unlife as skeletons in an undead mockery of the soldiers they'd once been

The undead lay inert, scattered around the cavern, until intruders enter. Then they rise up to defend the vault, both Madar and Tsalaxa united in this one cause.

When characters enter the cavern, read:

This dark cavern is strewn with corpses. Most are badly decomposed or reduced to bare bones. Many are armed and armored with crumbling gear in two distinctly different styles. Some, however, appear to be freshly killed; the crimson gore beneath a pile of gith bodies can't be more than a few days old.

Across the gory killing field, the cavern gives way to a short tunnel. There, the unnatural lines of worked stone lead further into darkness.

The fresh corpses are the remains of canyon denizens who foolishly entered the cavern and were slain by the undead. The older corpses, of course, *are* the undead. Let the characters move into the cavern, spread out, and explore a bit before the undead rise to attack. The undead are slow-moving at first, so the characters aren't likely to be surprised by their sudden animation.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 2-1: Cavern of Eternal Conflict**.

The Crypt of Sorrow

The passage at the rear of the outer vault is obviously man-made. It winds through about 50 feet of rock before ending at a set of double doors.

When the characters arrive at the doors, read:

Before you stands a pair of towering doors. Their size is impressive, but even more astounding is that they are clad in copper! Even if it is as thin as a strand of hair, it is more metal than you have ever seen in one place.

The metal encasing the doors is copper, easily recognized by its greenish patina. The copper is foil-thin and has been affixed with a powerful adhesive. Removing it cleanly would take weeks of painstaking labor. It can be chipped away in chunks in only a few hours, but the resulting heap of gravel would need to be hauled in a wagon to a furnace to melt off and retrieve the copper. In all, about 80 gp worth of copper can be salvaged from the doors with diligent effort. This can count as a portion of treasure parcel 4 or simply be a reward for determined characters.

The doors are not locked, simply heavy. Darom Madar did not have time to seal them properly when he fled the battle in the outer vault to seal himself in the treasure room.

When the characters open the doors, read:

This large stone chamber is dominated by a trio of sarcophagi. They surround a stone obelisk which towers10 feet in the air. Every surface of the obelisk is scribed with writing. Portions of the ceiling have collapsed, leaving piles of rubble in various places. On the far side of the room, a solid dam of dark material is set into a recess in the wall.

This chamber was originally intended to house the remains of Darom Madar's wife and two eldest sons, all slain by House Tsalaxa assassins. In the century that has passed since their deaths, the spirits of the three have become restless and have risen as ghostly abominations. They now lurk within their sarcophagi, waiting for living creatures to invade their tomb so they may rise up and feed upon life energy.

In addition to the ghostly undead, a more subtle danger awaits intruders. The obelisk in the center of the room is scribed with the names of each and every member of House Madar, stretching back to the founding of the house. It has become a kind of battery for the rage and sorrow of House Madar's last days. The obelisk leeches negative emotions from living creatures to generate dangerous quasi-undead known as wisp wraiths.

There is no light in this chamber other than what the characters bring with them. Darkness would give the incorporeal undead a perfect opportunity to ambush the characters.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 2-2: The Crypt of Sorrow**.

Opening the Vault

After the fight against the crypt's inhabitants, characters have time to explore the chamber. The seal that closes off the back corridor appears a deep, smoky gray. It is in fact silver cladding which, like the copper on the outer doors, is tarnished by age. The tarnish makes it difficult to recognize the material as silver, especially since characters at this level probably have never seen much silver and certainly have never seen any that was allowed to tarnish. A character who scrapes at it delicately with a knife can discover its true nature, but rough scraping will simply cut through the silver foil and reveal only the stone beneath.

When characters approach the wall, read:

A huge slab of smooth, dark, smoky-colored material stretches across the recessed wall. Charred bones and small heaps of ash at its base lend it an air of menace. There is no visible means of shifting, raising, or lowering it—if it is a door at all.

Darom Madar sealed away himself and the treasure of his house to prevent it falling into the hands of the villainous House Tsalaxa. The massive silver door that protects the treasure vault was created at an unfathomable cost, trapped by the most skilled trapsmiths, and enchanted by House Madar's most skilled arcane spellcasters. The final product is a nearly impenetrable door that can be moved aside only by those skilled in both the mechanical and the arcane.

This door is so cunningly fitted into its frame that it may not be immediately recognizable as a door. It could just as easily be a recessed nook for a ceremonial altar that's no longer present or merely a symbolic portal to the afterlife.

Once characters start in on a close examination of the door, they've begun the "Opening the Vault" skill challenge, whether or not the players realize they're in a skill challenge.

Opening the Vault Skill Challenge

Level: 3 (XP 750)

Complexity: 5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Arcana, Thievery

Arcana (DC 13; standard action; 1 success, no maximum): Your knowledge of the arcane arts allows you to puzzle out the inner workings of the traps and other magical devices that lurk within the barrier.

Thievery (DC 13; standard action; 1 success, no maximum): Your fingers are deft, your knowledge of mechanical traps and opening mechanisms superb. Your skills are instrumental in overcoming this obstacle.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, History, Perception

Dungeoneering (DC 10; standard action; 0 successes): You've seen more than your fair share of traps and well-guarded doors. You might not have the mechanical aptitude of a skilled trapsmith, but your experience can certainly aid your party. You grant a +2 bonus to the next Thievery check made as part of this skill challenge.

History (DC 13; standard action; 0 successes): You have some knowledge of House Madar's arcane practices, knowledge that could prove invaluable here. You grant a +2 bonus to the next Arcana check made as part of this skill challenge.

Perception (DC 15; immediate reaction; 0 successes, 3 attempts maximum): Your keen eyes allow you to spot an impending blunder by one of your companions who is trying to bypass the wall. You allow an ally who has just failed a skill check in one of this challenge's primary skills to reroll his skill check with a -2 penalty. Failing again on the reroll has no additional effect.

Success: You manage to disarm the wall's copious traps and trigger the mechanism that causes it to lower into a slot in the floor. You can now enter the lost vault of Darom Madar.

Failure: Each failure earned in this skill challenge triggers once of the wall's traps.

Arcana Failure: A botched Arcana check triggers a magical blast from the wall. Roll a d6 to determine the size of the blast in squares, then roll a d4 to determine what kind of energy is unleashed: 1 = acid, 2 = electricity, 3 = fire, 4 = thunder. Once you've determined the size of the blast and the type of energy unleashed, make the following attack against characters in the blast: Close blast 1-6; +6 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 3 (energy) damage.

Thievery Failure: A botched Thievery check triggers one of the wall's mechanical traps. Roll a d4 to determine how many characters are targeted by the trap and select those characters randomly. Then make the following attack against each of those characters: Ranged 10; +9 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

If the characters earn three failures, the wall cannot be opened for 24 hours; characters can try again after that much time has passed. A DC 12 Arcana or Thievery check reveals this fact. While they wait, consider having a group of monsters from one of the optional combat encounters surprise the heroes.

Treasure Chamber

When the silver wall descends, read:

The silver wall slides downward into the ground, revealing a short passageway that leads to a small room. Within you can see chests, racks of weapons, and other amazing valuables piled around the chamber. Standing in the middle of the vault, however, is a withered, ragged figure in rotting finery. Its gaunt features are dreadful and unearthly.

Darom Madar did not escape the fate of the rest of his house. He was wounded in the battle with House Tsalaxa assassins but managed to seal himself in the treasure chamber before succumbing to his wounds. He also did not escape the fate of those who died within the vault and has become an undead horror fueled by rage and hatred.

The monster Darom Madar has become is called an oath wight, a creature animated by a twisted sense of duty to a task left unfinished or interrupted. He has waited here in the dark and the dust for over a century and is quite eager to inflict his all-consuming rage and sense of loss on the living.

Darom Madar does not try to surprise the characters. He simply charges into melee as soon as the silver wall falls.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 2-4: The Rage of Darom Madar**.

When the characters defeat the animated corpse of Darom Madar, they can set about looting his treasure. It is recommended that the compiled treasure be equivalent to ten level 3 treasure parcels. Remember, the characters don't get to keep all of the treasure themselves! They are here as Rhotan Vor's hirelings. They get their pick of the best loot and a cut of the proceeds once it has been sold in Tyr.

You can create all the treasure parcels and then let the characters choose their items from that list, or for simplicity's sake, you can simply give each character one item from his or her wish list.

Faced with all that treasure, many players will undoubtedly toy with the idea of doing away with Rhotan Vor and his workers, taking the skiffs, and keeping all the treasure for themselves. Whatever opinion they might have about Rhotan Vor and his teamsters, this is a very risky plan at their level. Let them know that they're probably biting off more than they can chew, and be sure that they understand the situation clearly before proceeding. They can almost certainly accomplish the first part—killing the merchant and his crew—but that's where their trouble will begin. Rhotan Vor is part of the Wavir trading house, which is powerful in its own right and has mercantile connections all around the Tablelands. Their skiffs will be recognized in most places. Wavir undoubtedly pays protection money to crooked templars, who will lose credibility with their 'clients' if they let a murder like this go unpunished. None of that means the characters can't go down this road if that's the choice they make; it's guaranteed to launch them on a career of thrilling adventure. But before doing something rash, they should understand that it's likely to be a short career if they make enemies of Wavir and corrupt templars at such low level.

Assassin Ambush

Another squad of assassins in the employ of House Tsalaxa has tracked the characters to the cavern that holds the vault of Darom Madar. Their mission is to kill the characters; although Haneth has instructed them to locate the treasure of House Madar – if it exists. So instead of following the characters into the vault and possibly having to deal with whatever dangers lie within, the assassins are content to simply wait for the heroes to exit the entry cavern to spring their attack. The assassins assume they will face a weakened group of heroes who have already done the heavy lifting inside the vault, allowing the House Tsalaxa operatives to complete both missions assigned to them without any undue risk.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 2-5: Assassin Ambush**.

After the battle, the characters will recognize the assassins as being from the same group that attacked them on their trek across the Tablelands. The assassins carry nothing that might implicate them as operatives of House Tsalaxa.

Across the Alluvial Sand Wastes

After surviving the horrors of the vault of Darom Madar, the characters are in possession of a king's ransom in treasure. Now they must get the treasure loaded into Rhotan Vor's caravan and make the arduous trip across the Great Alluvial Wastes to Tyr. Unlike the first two parts of the journey, Rhotan Vor wants the heroes to remain close to the caravan on this leg. They must ensure that Rhotan Vor, his men, and his cargo arrive safely in Tyr.

Primary Quest: Express Caravan to Tyr
The heroes must escort Rhotan Vor and his caravan across the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes. With the three sand skiffs laden with treasure, the characters will be on foot and the trip will be a long one. Rhotan Vor believes the heroes' visible presence near the caravan will deter raiders and other wasteland dangers.

Quest XP: 750 (major quest) for reaching Tyr with the caravan intact.

Traveling with the caravan means that the characters are largely protected from the environmental dangers of the Alluvial Sand Wastes. Rhotan Vor has plenty of water and food which he shares with the heroes as they travel.

The Wavir trader and his men are not warriors; they rely upon the characters to defend them during combat. (They aren't fools, either; they watch the characters closely for signs of wavering loyalty.)

To portray the difficulty of defending the caravan while battling whatever desert horrors show up, the characters must make skill checks at the end of each combat round. The skills that can be used are Acrobatics, Athletics, Bluff, Insight, and Stealth. Each player can select which skill to use; different characters can use different skills. These skill checks determine whether the characters manage to keep the NPCs safe by pushing them away from danger, showing them where to hide, deflecting attacks, and distracting enemies.

The DC for these checks is 17. If the character hit with an attack during the round, he gets a +2 bonus on the check. If the character didn't hit with any attacks during the round, he gets a -2 penalty on the check. (It might be simpler for some groups to keep track of these checks if each player makes the die roll at the end of the character's turn rather than waiting for the end of the round. Some bonuses might be lost this way if, for example, a character didn't hit during his turn but hit with an opportunity attack later in the turn.)

At the end of the turn, after all these skill checks are made, the DM rolls 1d6 (if there are more than six player characters, roll 1d8 instead). Subtract the number of successful skill checks from the roll. The result is how many hits the NPCs took from enemy attacks.

To keep bookkeeping simple, each NPC can survive two hits, but a third hit kills him. A dead NPC can't take any more hits. Rhotan Vor has eight men with him; two pilots and six deckhands. Distribute hits between them randomly. Rhotan Vor will not take hits this way unless none of the characters succeeded on their skill check or he is the only remaining NPC. In the first case, he takes one of the hits; in the second case, he takes all of them.

Losing crew members can leave the sand skiffs without enough crew to proceed. For each pilot or two deckhands lost, one of the sand skiffs and all the treasure it is carrying must be abandoned. Rhotan Vor deducts the cost of an abandoned silt skimmer from the characters' cut of the treasure when the loot is sold in Tyr, unless they take steps to conceal it in the desert and accompany an expedition to retrieve it later (which can be the hook for your next adventure!). Characters with the Dune Trader or Wasteland Nomad theme can fill in for lost deckhands but not for lost skiff pilots.

Optional Encounters

The condensed encounters below can be run as the characters cross the Alluvial Sand Wastes. You can use the *Desert of Athas* Dungeon Tiles to quickly create an encounter area appropriate for the area or sketch one on your battlemat. These encounters are completely optional but can serve as a good way to give the characters a bit more experience if you'd like them to gain a level before the final encounter.

Carrion Killers

Encounter Level 3 (XP 750)

2 jhakar trackers
2 jhakar skirmishers
2 kestrekel blood flocks

The characters come upon the mammoth corpse of a mekillot which is serving as an incredible bounty for a number of scavengers. The most dangerous scavengers, a pack of jhakars and a horde of tiny kestrekels, are none too pleased at having their meal disturbed. In addition, now that fresher fare has arrived on scene, the carrion eaters turn predator.

Kruthik Clutch

Encounter Level 4 (XP 849)

2 kruthik adults
4 kruthik hatchlings
3 kruthik young

A small clutch of kruthiks have made their lair beneath the sandy wastes. Through their tremorsense, they can detect potential prey moving across the sand above them. When the characters and the caravan enter the area, the kruthiks burrow up through the sand and attack.

Silken Surprise

This encounter occurs at any point when the characters and the caravan are stopped for the night. Unbeknownst to the heroes, a silk wyrm has been following them from the air in *shadow form* waiting for the cover of darkness. Once the heroes settle in, the silk wyrm sneaks into their camp in the hope of surprising its prey. The silk wyrm uses *shadow form* in its effort to ambush any characters that are awake. Assume a stealth check of 25 (a roll of 15) for the silk wyrm, making it quite difficult to spot before it strikes.

When the silk wyrm attacks, read:

The desert night is cool and calm, and little stirs across the vast moonlit waste. A long, sinuous shadow suddenly splashes across the ground as something massive hurtles from the night sky, its toothy maw agape.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 3-1: Silken Surprise**.

The Terror of Tsalaxa

The assassins hired by House Tsalaxa to deal with the characters have failed so far. However, House Tsalaxa is now aware that the characters have found the treasure of Darom Madar and are on their way to Tyr. Eager to recover the treasure, Haneth has sent one of his own relatives to lead a pair of skilled assassins in a final attack against the caravan.

Tyron Tsalaxa is Haneth's youngest cousin and eager to prove himself to the house leader. He and his hand-picked assassins ride to battle mounted on crodlus (Tyron rides the war crodlu). They plan to use the ferocious beasts as deadly living weapons against the characters.

If Tyron has a weakness, it is a reckless confidence in his own skill. This overconfidence leads him to forsake an ambush and attack the characters directly. He believes ferocity and mobility granted by the well-trained crodlu mounts will be more than a match for anything the heroes can throw at them. When he launches the attack, he and his men simply ride over a dune into plain view and let fly on the heroes.

When Tyron attacks, read:

The desert morning dawns hot and bright, but today the heat is not so oppressive. Perhaps it only feels this way because you near your destination, the great city-state of Tyr, where you will sell the fabulous treasure in the sand skiffs.

Before you can begin counting the gold pieces in your head, three mounted figures ride into view and halt at the top of a dune. Could they be just desert nomads curious about travelers? It's not likely when you see them level their crossbows and let loose a rain of bolts into the caravan.

When Tyron and his men attack, Rhotan Vor maneuvers the sand skiffs into a U-shaped barrier which he hopes will give him, his men, and the characters some cover from the missiles. If the characters simply hunker beneath the skiffs with the rest the caravan crew, however, Rhotan Vor curses them as cowards and demands they engage the enemy and earn their cut of the treasure.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 3-2, The Terror of Tsalaxa**.

Aftermath

If the characters search the body of Tyron Tsalaxa, they find a signet ring on his left hand bearing the symbol of his house. Even if they don't recognize it as the symbol of house Tsalaxa, Rhotan Vor does. By now, they should know the story of House Madar's fall at the hands of its villainous rivals. The fact that House Tsalaxa has made numerous attempts on their lives should prompt the characters to be circumspect once they reach Tyr, because it would seem they have made dire enemies even before setting foot in the great city.

Conclusion

When the characters reach the gates of Tyr, they have accomplished something legendary. Not only have they found and plundered an ancient treasure vault, they have overcome the dangers of the wastes, of ambushes and assassins, of undead horrors ... and they've turned a tidy profit out of it. Rhotan Vor happily pays them the agreed upon 10 percent of the treasure (less any sand skiffs lost) and spreads tales of the character's prowess among other Wavir traders. Word of the heroes' deeds spreads to the other great merchant houses and soon brings lucrative offers to their doorstep.

The heroes have also, however, made a powerful enemy in Haneth Tsalaxa and his house, and possibly in whatever faction of Templars he has paid to smooth his transactions in Tyr and elsewhere. It is likely that the frustrated Tsalaxa elder will seek revenge against the upstart heroes who robbed him and his house of both a fortune in treasure and the glory of bringing it home in triumph. This will only be worsened if the characters raise a public fuss about having been attacked by agents of House Tsalaxa or show off Tyron's ring as evidence of Tsalaxa treachery. Such accusations will gain them nothing but more intense hatred from Haneth Tsalaxa. If Tyron was killed during the final battle, as is likely, that serves as another strike against them. Even though Haneth had no particular fondness for his cousin, such a killing is still one more reason to hate the characters and plot revenge.

Finally, should a living scion of House Madar emerge (or even a false claimant to the line), they too may take issue with the characters laying claim to their ancestral wealth.

With a bit of experience under their belts, the characters should be ready for *Marauders of the Dune Sea*, which will expose them to even more adventure on and around Tyr.

Encounter 1-1: Crimson Oasis

Encounter Level 3 (XP 725)

Setup

1 dwarf sun priest (D)
1 halfling wilder (W)
3 human wasteland raiders (R)

Tactics

When combat begins, regardless of whether the Crimson Vipers surprise the characters, the human wasteland raiders charge forward and engage the characters with their spears while Drokan and Yassi keep their distance and assault the heroes with ranged attacks. Drokan targets a character engaged in melee with *bright ray* to hamper the hero's attacks and uses *sun's blessing* on a wasteland raider as soon as one of them becomes bloodied. Yassi lashes out at a potential enemy spellcaster with *mind thrust*, focusing his attacks on a single target to gain combat advantage and deal extra damage. The wasteland raiders fight viciously, ganging up on a single character to take him or her out of the fight in a single round where possible.

The bandits know there is a bounty on their heads and do not expect mercy from the heroes, so they fight to the death.

Yassi, Halfling Wilder (W) **Level 3 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid, halfling XP 150

HP 38; **Bloodied** 19 **Initiative** +4
AC 15, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16 **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Traits

Nimble Reaction
A halfling wilder gains a +2 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks.

Combat Advantage
A halfling wilder deals 1d6 extra damage against any tZarget granting combat advantage to it.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage.

↛ **Mind Thrust** (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +8 vs. Will
Hit: 1d10 + 3 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the start of the wilder's next turn.

Skills Acrobatics +9, Stealth +9, Thievery +9
Str 11 (+1) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 17 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment club

Drokan, Dwarf Sunpriest (D) **Level 5 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf XP 200

HP 52; **Bloodied** 26 **Initiative** +3
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 18 **Perception** +6
Speed 5 Low-light vision
Saving Throws +5 against poison effects

Traits

Stand the Ground
A dwarf sunpriest can move 1 square fewer when subject to pull, push, or slide.

Steady-Footed
A dwarf sunpriest can make a saving throw to avoid falling prone.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Gouge** (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 fire damage.

↛ **Bright Ray** (implement, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 4 radiant damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the start of the sunpriest's next turn.

Sun's Blessing (fire, healing) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: One ally within 5 squares of the sunpriest regains 10 hit points. Until the end of the sunpriest's next turn, that ally deals 5 extra fire damage with its melee attacks, and any enemy that hits that ally with a melee attack takes 5 fire damage.

Skills Dungeoneering +11, Endurance +11, Religion +9
Str 13 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 18 (+6)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 15 (+4) **Cha** 15 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Equipment hide armor, mace, totem

3 Human Wasteland Raiders (R)	Level 2 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 125 each
HP 40; **Bloodied** 20	**Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 5 damage.	
⸸ **Barbed Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The raider must not have a creature grabbed.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed.	
⸸ **Gutting Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the raider); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d4 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Skills Intimidate +5	
Str 18 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+2)	
Con 16 (+4) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 9 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment hide armor, barbed spear, dagger	

Features of the Area

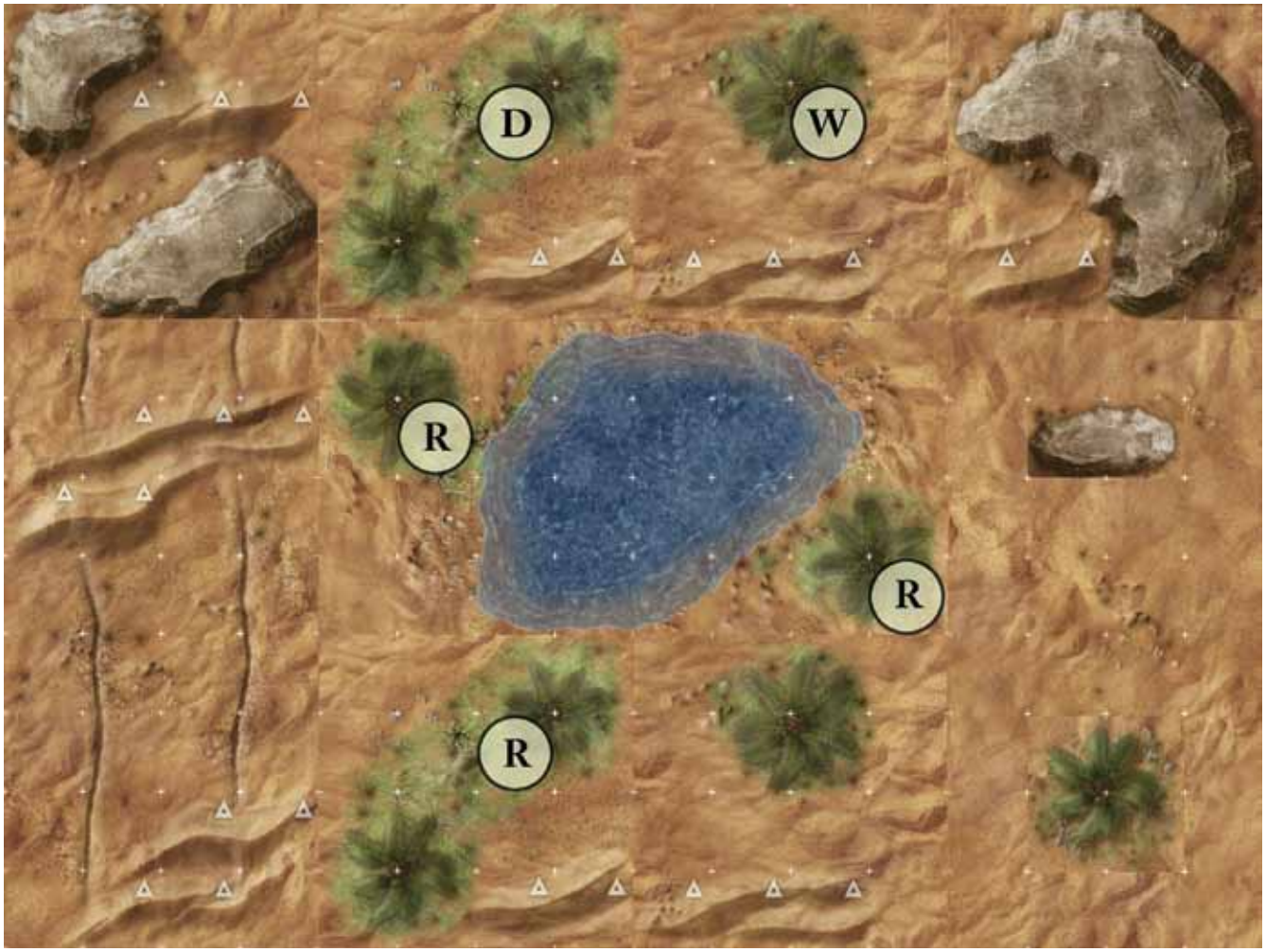
Illumination: Daylight.

Dunes: The small dunes in this area are difficult terrain. A Medium character who falls prone in a space with dunes gains total concealment to ranged attacks.

Boulders: The three largest boulders in this area are 10 feet high. A DC 10 Athletics check is required to climb atop of one.

Oasis: This small, muddy pool is only two feet deep. It is difficult terrain.

Trees/Scrub: The stunted desert trees and scrub provide cover to adjacent creatures.



Encounter 1-2: Wasteland Assassins

Encounter Level 3 (XP 700)

Setup

1 crodlu (C)
1 defiler assassin (D)
3 elven assassins (E)

Tactics

The elven assassins begin combat by using *critical aim* and then launching a volley of arrows at the characters while the defiler sits atop his crodlu and blasts the characters with *hand of blight*. The assassins rely solely on ranged attacks until the heroes either charge up the dune and engage them in melee or prove to have effective ranged attacks of their own.

Once melee is joined, the elven assassins use their ability to shift 1 square after a successful attack with their short swords to move into flanking positions against the heroes. Once an elven assassin has combat advantage against a character, it uses *razor flurry* each round. The elves use *elven accuracy* to reroll a missed attack with *razor flurry* but not with their melee or ranged basic attacks.

The defiler assassin uses the speed of his crodlu mount to remain out of range of character melee attacks. He primarily relies on *hand of blight* to attack the characters at range but moves in closer to smite a bloodied character with *ashen scourge* if the opportunity presents itself. The defiler assassin uses *defiling scourge* only if wounded or if he has used *ashen scourge* during the combat. If forced into melee, he relies on the melee attacks of his crodlu mount rather than his own.

The elven assassins fight to the death, having no immediate means of escape. The defiler assassin, however, uses the speed of his mount to avoid death if possible. If the characters cannot catch the fleeing assassin, he joins up with the assassin squad waiting to attack the heroes in the Canyon of Guthay.

Development

Searching the corpses of slain assassins reveals little other than that they were well-equipped. If the characters wait for Rhotan Vor's caravan to catch up with them, the dwarven trader can tell them little about the identity of the mysterious assassins.

Crodlu (C) **Level 3 Brute**
Large natural beast (reptile) XP 150

HP 55; **Bloodied** 27 **Initiative** +3
AC 15, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13 **Perception** +1
Speed 8

Standard Actions

⊕ **Beak** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage.

⊕ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.

↓ **Pounce** ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The crodlu can move its speed. Whether or not the crodlu moves, it can use *beak* and *claws*, making each attack against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target also falls prone

Str 19 (+5) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 15 (+3) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 8 (+0)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** -

Defiler Assassin (D) **Level 4 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175

HP 45; **Bloodied** 22 **Initiative** +5
AC 16, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15 **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Traits

Defiling
Whenever a defiler assassin uses an implement power, each enemy within 3 squares of it takes 2 necrotic damage.

Implement Assassin
A defiler assassin deals 1d6 extra damage with attacks with the implement keyword against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Staff** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 1 damage.

Hand of Blight (implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of the defiler assassin's next turn.

Ashen Scourge (fire, implement, necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 4 fire damage, and the target grants combat advantage and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Triggered Actions

Defiling Scourge (healing) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the defiler assassin spends a healing surge.
Effect (Free Action): The defiler assassin regains a number of hit points equal to half the value of the triggering healing surge, and *ashen scourge* recharges.

Skills Arcana +11, Bluff +9, Stealth +10
Str 13 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 18 (+6) **Cha** 15 (+4)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment orb, spellbook

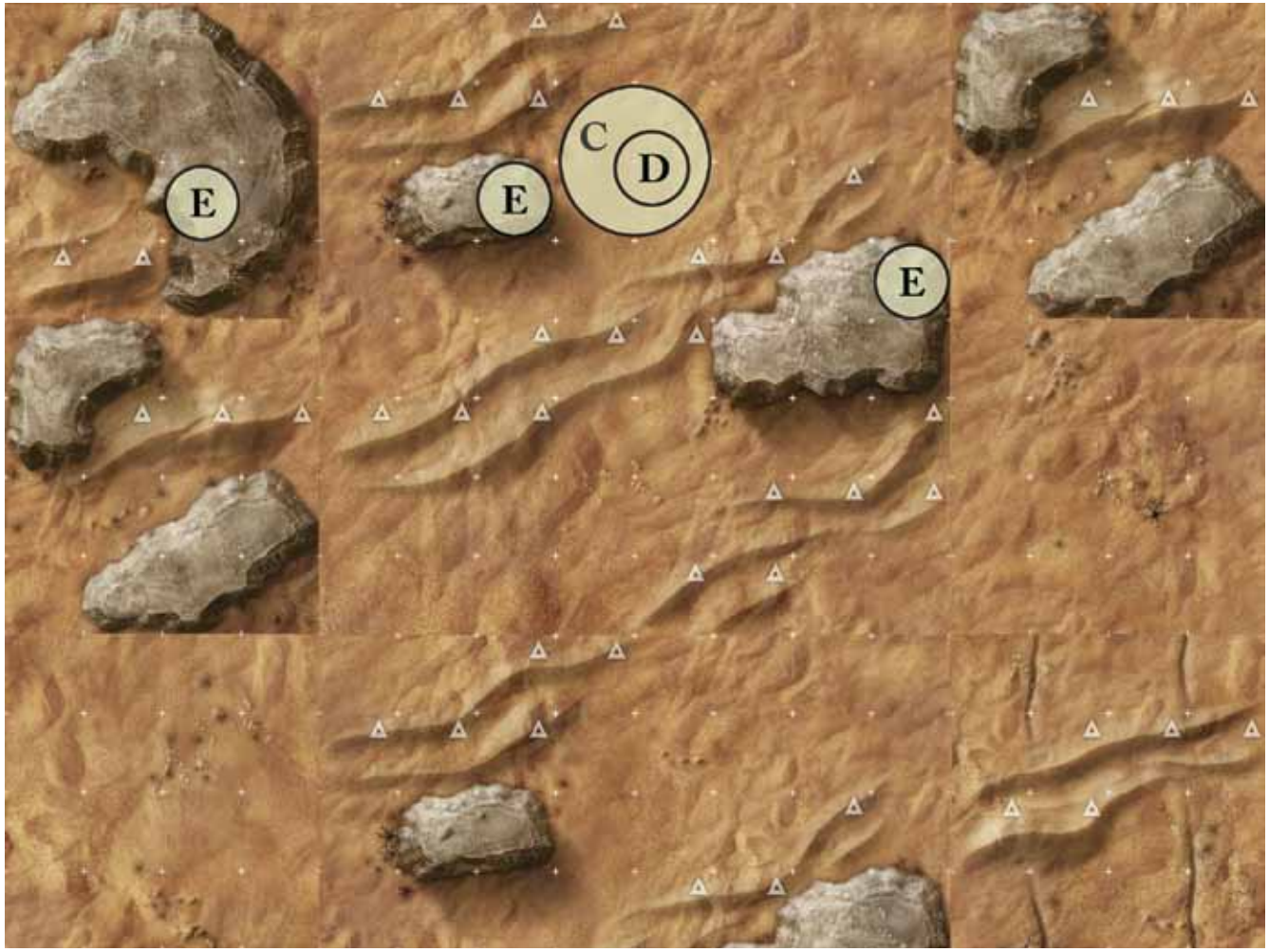
3 Elven Assassins (E)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium fey humanoid, elf	XP 125 each
HP 37; **Bloodied** 18	**Initiative** +6
AC 16, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14	**Perception** +3
Speed 7	
Traits	
Wild Step	
An elf ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.	
Standard Actions	
Obsidian Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage, and the elven assassin shifts 1 square.	
Bone Bow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 3 damage.	
Razor Flurry (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The elven assassin makes two *obsidian short sword* attacks against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Minor Actions	
Critical Aim (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃	
Effect: The elven assassin's bone bow gains the high crit quality until the start of its next turn.	
Free Actions	
Elven Accuracy ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The elven assassin rerolls one of its attack rolls and uses the second result.	
Skills Athletics +8, Bluff +7, Stealth +9	
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+3)	
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 13 (+2) **Cha** 13 (+2)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Elven	
Equipment obsidian short sword, bone bow, 20 bone arrows	

Features of the Area

Illumination: Daylight.

Boulders: The boulders in this area are 5 to 10 feet high. A DC 10 Athletics check is required to climb on top of one.

Dune: The dunes are difficult terrain, as marked on the map (by triangles).



Encounter 2-1: Cavern of Eternal Conflict

Encounter Level 4 (XP 800)

Setup

1 black reaver zombie (B)
9 decrepit skeletons (S)
3 zombies (Z)

When the undead animate, read:

The cavern suddenly explodes into unnatural life as nearly a dozen corpses animate and climb unsteadily to their feet. Zombies and skeletons armored in rotting tatters and clutching an assortment of broken, decrepit weapons unleash a chorus of guttural howls and then lurch to the attack.

Tactics

The zombies and skeletons in this encounter attack as two separate groups. Although they don't work against each other, they don't go out of their way to help one another. This is because there is still enough emotional residue in the rotting brains of these undead to recreate some of the animosity between the two groups when they were alive.

The black reaver zombie was once a defiler assassin in the employ of House Tsalaxa. It uses *shadow burst* to teleport into the middle of the characters and catch as many as possible in the resulting zone of darkness, then focuses its attacks on blinded characters. The rest of the zombies do what zombies do best: they lurch into melee with the closest character.

The skeletons, once soldiers of House Madar, hang back and pelt the characters with ranged attacks while keeping spread out to avoid area effects. The skeletons enter melee only if cornered.

Development

Characters examining destroyed undead can find signet rings, talismans, and other bits and pieces bearing the marks of both House Tsalaxa and House Madar. A simple DC 10 History check allows the characters to correctly identify the symbols of both houses.

Black Reaver Zombie (B) — **Level 5 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) — XP 200

HP 51; **Bloodied** 25 — **Initiative** +10
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16 — **Perception** +2
Speed 7 — Blind, blindsight 10
Immune blinded, disease, gaze, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic

Traits

Scoured by Light
A black reaver zombie that takes radiant damage cannot use *shadow burst* until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Bite (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage plus 1d6 necrotic damage, or plus 3d6 necrotic damage against a creature that could not see the zombie at the start of the zombie's turn.

Move Actions

Shadow Burst (teleportation, zone) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Effect: the black reaver teleports 5 squares, and then creates a zone in a close burst 1 that lasts until the start of its next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all creatures except the zombie, and any other creature except the zombie is blinded while within the zone.

Skills Stealth +11

Str 10 (+2)	**Dex** 19 (+6)	**Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 12 (+3)

Alignment chaotic evil — **Languages** Common

9 Decrepit Skeletons (S) — **Level 1 Minion**
Medium natural animate — XP 25 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. — **Initiative** +3
AC 16, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14,**Will** 13 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6 — Darkvision
Immune disease; poison

Standard Actions

Obsidian Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.

Bone Shortbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 15/30 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 3 damage.

Str 15 (+2)	**Dex** 17 (+3)	**Wis** 14 (+2)
Con 13 (+1)	**Int** 3 (-4)	**Cha** 3 (-4)

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** –
Equipment heavy shield, obsidian longsword, bone shortbow, arrows (30)

3 Zombies (Z) — **Level 2 Brute**
Medium natural animate — XP 125 each

HP 40; **Bloodied** 20 — **Initiative** -1
AC 13, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 9, **Will** 10 — **Perception** +0
Speed 4 — Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Traits

Zombie Weakness
Any critical hit to the zombie reduces it to 0 hit points instantly.

Standard Actions

Slam ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature) +6 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage.

Zombie Grab ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +4 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is grabbed (until escape). Checks made to escape the zombie's grab take a -5 penalty.

Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 6 (-1)	**Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 1 (-4)	**Cha** 3 (-3)

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** –

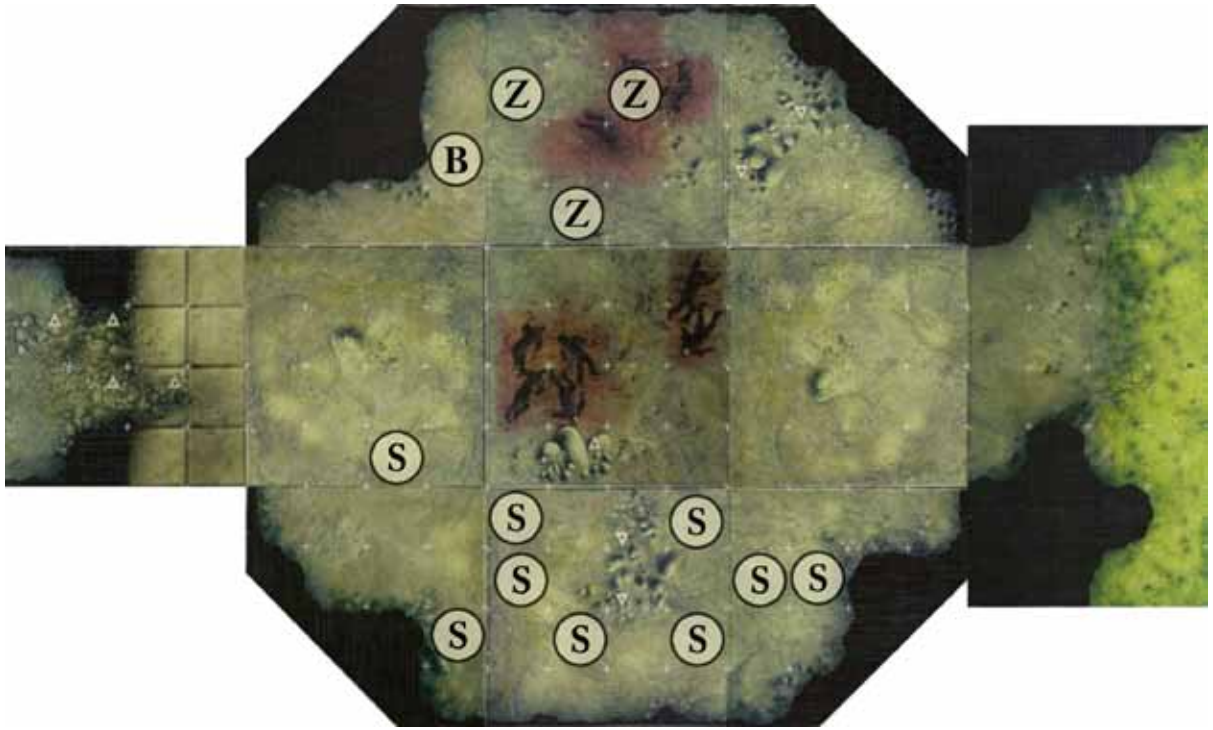
Features of the Area

Illumination: Darkness.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Corpses: Squares with common corpses (not undead) are difficult terrain.

Rubble: Squares with rubble are difficult terrain.



Encounter 2-2: Crypt of Sorrow

Encounter Level 4+ (XP 875+)

Setup

Dynera Madar, weeping wraith (D)
Lyos & Taran Madar, phantom warriors (P)
4+ wisp wraiths (W)
Sorrowstone hazard (S)

When the undead attack, read:

Suddenly, the terrible sound of a woman weeping fills the room and numerous ghostly shadows rise from the sarcophagi and floors. The specters glide silently across the room, their ghostly visages twisted in rage and grief.

Tactics

When battle begins, the wisp wraiths engage the characters in melee. Lyos and Taran take up positions next to the sorrowstone. The two phantom warriors hope to lure the characters adjacent to the sorrowstone to trigger its terrible power before engaging the heroes. Once the phantom warriors enter melee, they fight as a pair, focusing their attacks on a single character to gain the benefits of *phantom tactics*.

The wisp wraiths use phasing to move through the floors and gain advantageous positions against the heroes. They use *shadow caress* indiscriminately, simply targeting the nearest character with their necrotic touch.

Dynera Madar does not enter melee immediately. Instead, the weeping wraith attacks from a distance with *woeful blast* targeted against obvious spellcasters or heroes not engaged in melee. Dynera enters melee with her *sorrowful touch* when one of her sons is destroyed.

The undead fight to their destruction.

Dynera Madar, Weeping Wraith (D) — **Level 5 Controller (Leader)**
Medium shadow humanoid — XP 200

HP 44; **Bloodied** 22 — **Initiative** +2
AC 16, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17 — **Perception** +2
Speed Fly 6 (hover) — Darkvision
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** insubstantial

Traits

Weeping Aura (psychic) ✦ **Aura 2**
Living creatures within the aura take a -1 penalty to all defenses.

Standard Actions

Sorrowful Touch (necrotic, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature): +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is grief stricken (save ends). While grief stricken, the target gains vulnerable psychic 5 and is dazed.

Woeful Blast (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +9 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Woeful Shriek (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +8 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is grief stricken (save ends). While grief stricken, the target gains vulnerable psychic 5 and is dazed.

Skills Stealth +7
Str 10 (+2) **Dex** 11 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 9 (+1) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+5)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common

Lyos & Taran Madar, Phantom Warriors (P) — **Level 4 Soldier**
Medium shadow humanoid — XP 175 each

HP 40; **Bloodied** 20 — **Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6, Fly 6 (hover); phasing — darkvision
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** insubstantial

Traits

Phantom Tactics
A phantom warrior has combat advantage against any target that has another phantom warrior adjacent to it.

Standard Actions

Phantom Sword (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 2 necrotic damage, and the target is marked until the end of the phantom warrior's next turn.

Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 14 (+4)
Alignment Any **Languages** Common

4 Wisp Wraiths (W) — **Level 1 Minion**
Medium shadow humanoid — XP 25 each

AC 13, **Fortitude** 11, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12 — **Initiative** +3
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. — **Perception** +0
Speed Fly 6 (hover); phasing darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial, 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

Shadow Caress (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +4 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the wisp wraith's next turn

Move Actions

Shadow Glide ✦ **Encounter**
The wisp wraith shifts up to 6 squares.

Skills Stealth +8
Str 3 (-4) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 4 (-3) **Cha** 15 (+2)
Alignment Chaotic Evil **Languages** Common

Sorrowstone Hazard (S)	Level 4 Warder XP 175

This huge stone obelisk stands 10 feet tall and has been carved with the names of House Madar ancestors. A palpable aura of grief and loss surrounds the stone in a heavy shroud.

Hazard: This stone, imbued with grief and rage, has become a battery of negative emotion created by the tragic events that befell House Madar. It leeches negative emotion from nearby living creatures and uses this stolen energy to create wisp wraiths.

Perception

No perception check is necessary to notice the stone.

Trigger

When a living creature enters a square adjacent to the sorrowstone, it makes the following attack.

Attack

Immediate Reaction **Melee** 1

Attack: +7 vs. Will

Hit: 1d8 + 3 psychic damage, and a wisp wraith appears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the target. The sorrowstone can create only a single wisp wraith from any one living creature. A creature whose negative emotions have already fueled the creation of a wisp wraith still suffers psychic damage from the sorrowstone's attack.

Countermeasures

The sorrowstone can be attacked (AC 14, Fortitude 10; hp 60). When the hazard is reduced below half its starting hit points, it can no longer create wisp wraiths. When the hazard is reduced to 0 hit points, it is destroyed.

Features of the Area

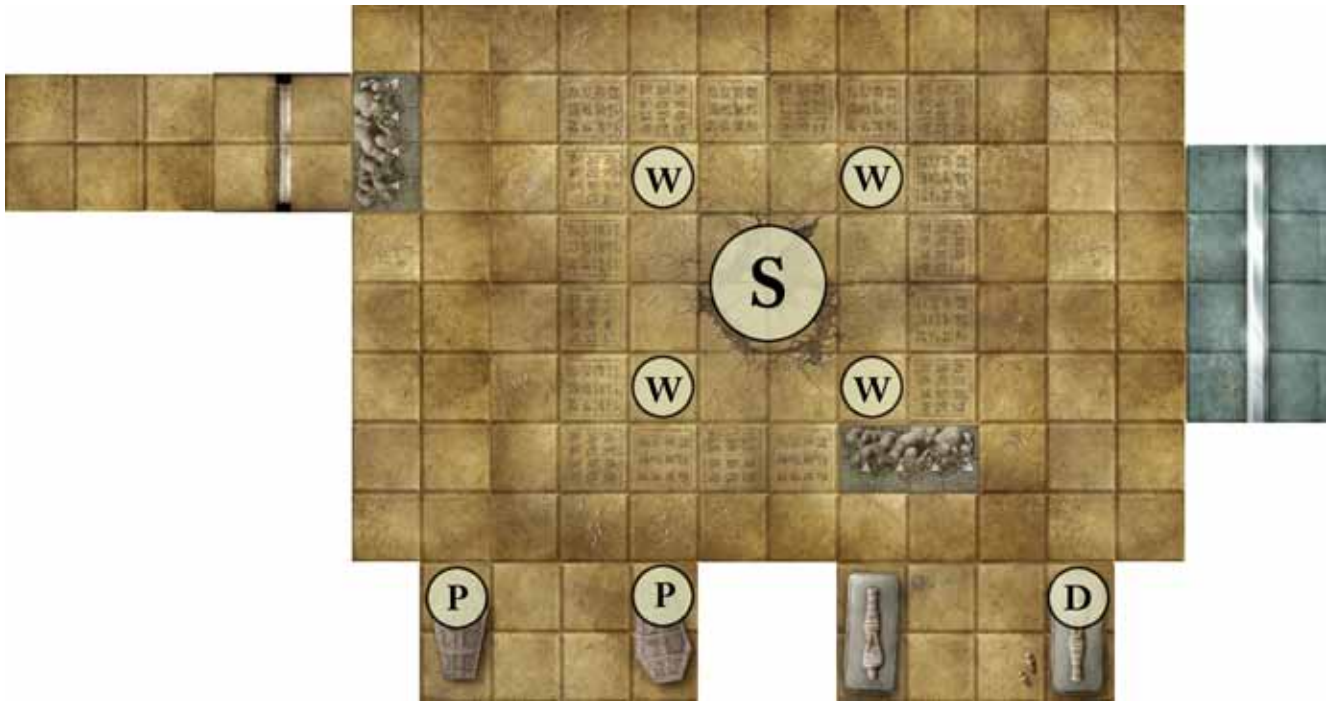
Illumination: Darkness

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Rubble: Squares with rubble are difficult terrain.

Sarcophagi: The smashed sarcophagus is difficult terrain that provides cover. The intact sarcophagi are 4 feet high and provide cover. A character can jump atop an intact sarcophagus with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Sorrowstone: The sorrowstone is blocking terrain that provides cover.



Encounter 2-4: The Rage of Darom Madar

Encounter Level 5 (XP 875)

Setup

Darom Madar, lesser oath wight (D)
Treasure (T)

Tactics

Darom Madar opens combat by moving forward and blasting the party with *frustration's fury*. He tries to catch as many heroes in the blast as possible. He then spends one of his action points to follow with *rotting touch* on an adjacent character and allows the damage to trigger *oath's agony* on the same target.

When he is bloodied, he targets a spellcaster with *accursed gaze* each round, hoping to turn his target into a living weapon. When he returns because of *promised return*, he appears adjacent to a bloodied character and spends his last action point to make two *rotting touch* attacks against the unfortunate hero. He also triggers *oath's agony* on the stricken character for a triple dose of necrotic pain. In the second round after Darom rejoins the fight with *promised return*, he uses *frustration's fury* again and then resorts to *rotting touch* and *oath's agony* until either he or the characters are destroyed.

Darom Madar, Lesser Oath Wight (D) — **Level 4 Solo Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (undead), human — XP 875

HP 224; **Bloodied** 112 — **Initiative** +4
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 17 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6 — Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Inevitable Failure ✦ Aura 2
Enemies within the aura that aren't dominated by the wight take a -2 penalty to attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks.

Standard Actions

Rotting Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target cannot regain hit points until the end of the wight's next turn.

Frustration's Fury (charm, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** when the wight uses *promised return*.
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +6 vs. Will
Hit: 1d10 + 4 psychic damage, and the target uses a free action to make an at-will attack of the wight's choice, which can include a charge, against a creature of the wight's choice.
Miss: Half damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the wight's next turn.

Minor Actions

Accursed Gaze (charm) ✦ **At-will (1/round)**
Requirement: The wight must be bloodied.
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +8 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated until the end of the wight's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Oath's Agony (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Trigger: An adjacent enemy takes damage.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 1 (triggering enemy); +6 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the wight's next turn.

Promised Return ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The oath wight drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The oath wight is removed from play until the start of its next turn. The wight then appears with hit points equal to its bloodied value in an unoccupied square within 5 squares of its last location.

Str 12 (+3)	**Dex** 14 (+4)	**Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 16 (+5)	**Int** 12 (+3)	**Cha** 18 (+6)

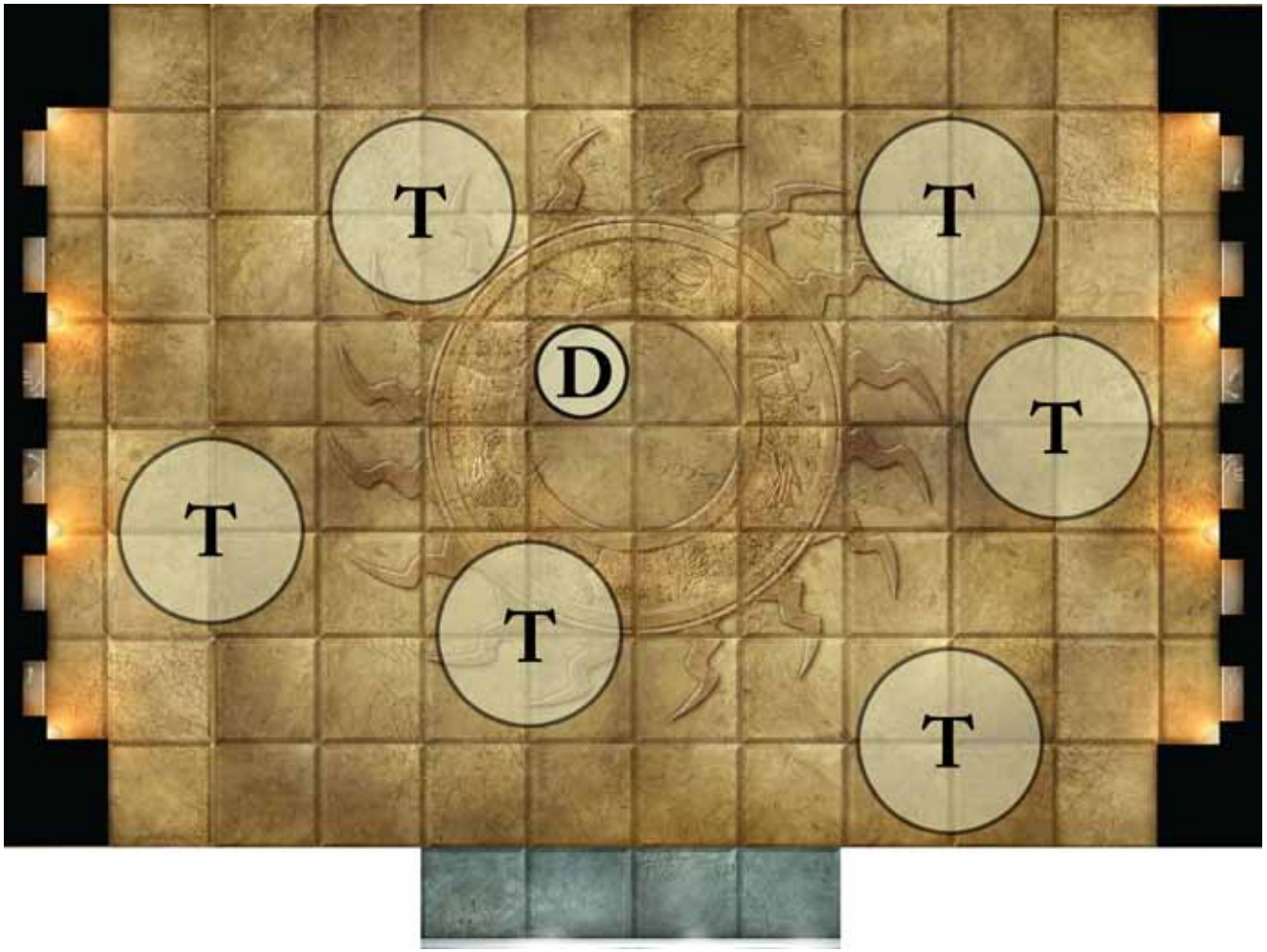
Alignment evil — **Languages** Common

Features of the Area

Illumination: Darkness

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Treasure: Squares with treasure are difficult terrain.



Encounter 2-5: Assassin Ambush

Encounter Level 4 (XP 900)

Setup

1 defiler assassin (D)
3 elven assassins (E)
2 goliath thugs (G)

As soon as the characters exit the vault and reenter the Canyon of Guthay, the assassins are waiting for them. Pay close attention to how the players described their actions after the fight against Darom Madar, because it can determine whether they enter this combat with the benefit of a short rest. The assassins make no attempt to hide and simply attack the heroes on sight.

Tactics

As soon as the assassins see the characters, the goliath thugs use *stone's endurance* and rush forward into melee. The elven assassins open fire with their *bone bows*, and the defiler assassin blasts the heroes with *hand of blight*. In the second round, the elven assassins and the defiler assassin slowly move forward while continuing to use ranged attacks. The goliath thugs both use *push through* on the closest character and follow that up with a greatclub attack on the prone hero.

In the third round, the elven assassins abandon their bows and join the goliaths in melee. The defiler assassin chooses this point to use *ashen scourge* on a likely spellcaster, preferably one who is bloodied or at least injured.

All the assassins fight to the death.

Defiler Assassin (D) — **Level 4 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human — XP 175

HP 45; **Bloodied** 22 — **Initiative** +5
AC 16, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Traits

Defiling
Whenever a defiler assassin uses an implement power, each enemy within 3 squares of it takes 2 necrotic damage.

Implement Assassin
A defiler assassin deals 1d6 extra damage with attacks with the implement keyword against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Standard Actions

Staff (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 1 damage.

Hand of Blight (implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of the defiler assassin's next turn.

Ashen Scourge (fire, implement, necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 4 fire damage, the target grants combat advantage and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both)

Triggered Actions

Defiling Scourge (healing) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the defiler assassin spends a healing surge.
Effect (Free Action): The defiler assassin regains a number of hit points equal to half the value of the triggering healing surge, and *ashen scourge* recharges.

Skills Arcana +11, Bluff +9, Stealth +10

Str 13 (+3)	**Dex** 16 (+5)	**Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 18 (+6)	**Cha** 15 (+4)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment orb, spellbook

3 Elven Assassins (E) — **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid, elf — XP 125 each

HP 37; **Bloodied** 18 — **Initiative** +6
AC 16, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14 — **Perception** +3
Speed 7

Traits

Wild Step
An elf ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.

Standard Actions

Obsidian Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage, and the elven assassin shifts 1 square.

Bone Bow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 3 damage.

Razor Flurry (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The elven assassin makes two *obsidian short sword* attacks against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Minor Actions

Critical Aim (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Effect: The elven assassin's bone bow gains the high crit quality until the start of its next turn.

Free Actions

Elven Accuracy ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The elven assassin rerolls one of its attack rolls and uses the second result.

Skills Athletics +8, Bluff +7, Stealth +9

Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 17 (+4)	**Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 13 (+2)	**Int** 13 (+2)	**Cha** 13 (+2)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment obsidian short sword, bone bow, 20 bone arrows

2 Goliath Thugs (G)	Level 4 Brute
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175 each
HP 65; **Bloodied** 32	**Initiative** +4
AC 16, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15	**Perception** +4
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Greatclub** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.	
Minor Actions	
Push Through ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +5 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The goliath pushes the target, knocks it prone, and shifts 1 square into the square the target vacated.	
Stone's Endurance ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The goliath gains resist 5 to all damage until the end of its next turn.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Vengeful Clout** (weapon)	
Trigger: The goliath drops to 0 hit points.	
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (one creature); +5 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Str 20 (+7) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common	
Equipment hide armor, great club	

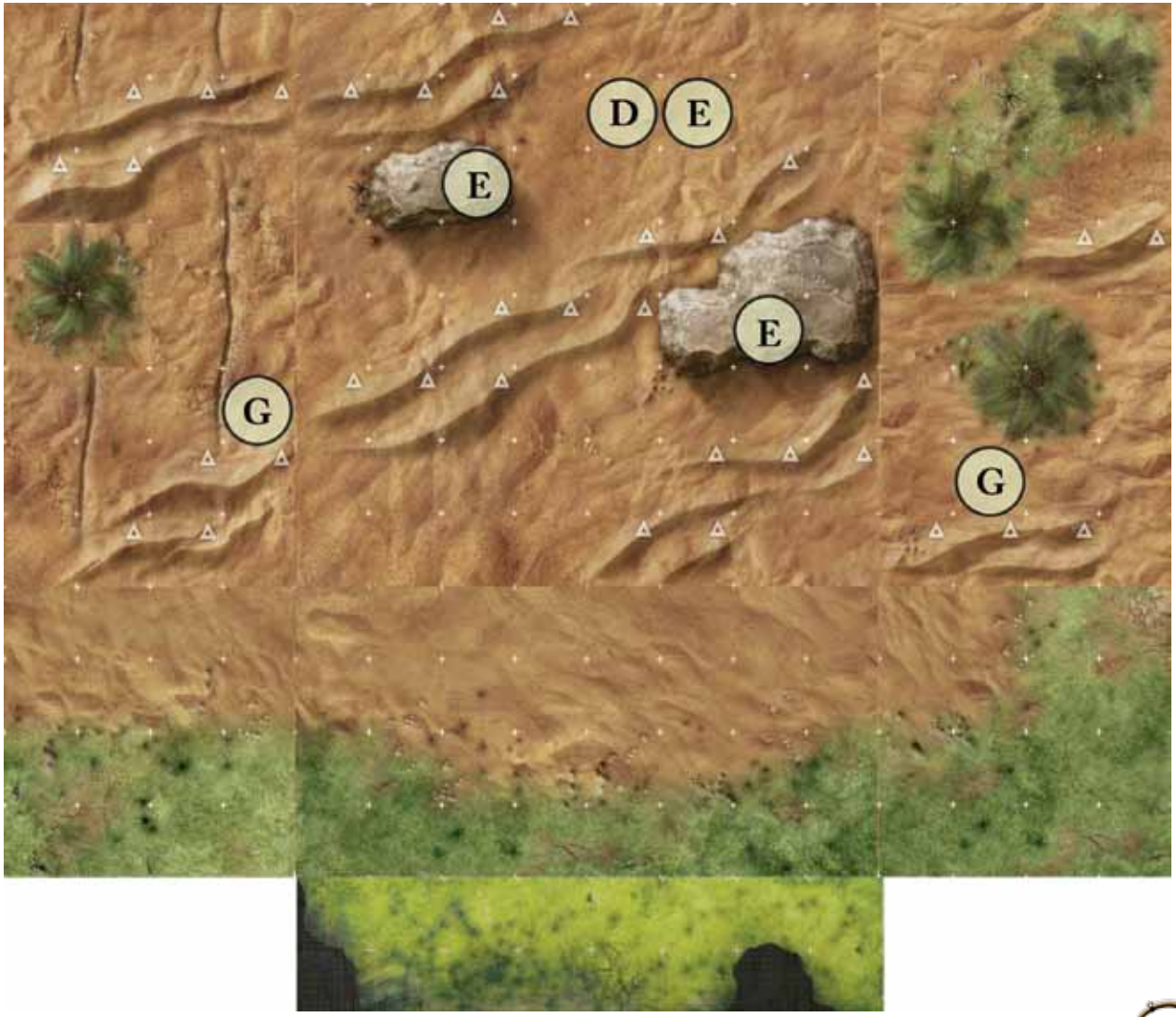
Features of the Area

Illumination: Daylight.

Dunes: The dunes are difficult terrain, as marked on the map. A Medium character who falls prone in a space with dunes gains total concealment to ranged attacks.

Boulders: The boulders are 10 feet high. A DC 10 Athletics check is required to climb atop one.

Trees/Scrub: The stunted desert trees and scrub provide cover to adjacent creatures.



Encounter 3-1: Silken Surprise

Encounter Level 3 (XP 750)

Setup

1 silk wyrm adult (S)

Tactics

The silk wyrm singles out a target and concentrates on it. If it can surprise its target, it uses *bite* in the surprise round and then follows up with another *bite* in the first full round. If the silk wyrm's target is not at least immobilized after the first round, then on the second round, it uses *serpent strike* to shift away, followed by *mesmerizing dread* to pull its target along with it. It then spends an action point to make two *bite* attacks against the target.

If the silk wyrm is unable to kill or immobilize its initial target and the rest of the characters are alerted to its presence, it does not shrink from combat. When confronted with multiple foes, it uses *wyrm strike* to attack two characters and *serpent strike* to shift out of disadvantageous positions. The silk wyrm relies on *silk strands* to keep its victims wrapped up, and uses *feed* on any immobilized, restrained, or helpless targets when the opportunity arises.

Silk Wyrm Adult (S) **Level 3 Solo Skirmisher**
Large natural magical beast (reptile) XP 750

HP 174; **Bloodied** 87 **Initiative** +7
AC 17, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 14 **Perception** +3
Speed 6, fly 8 (clumsy) Low-light vision
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Blood Scent
A silk wyrm's attacks against bloodied creatures ignore concealment.

Standard Actions

Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 3 poison damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is helpless (save ends).

Feed (healing) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one immobilized, restrained, or helpless creature); +6 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target loses 1 healing surge and the silk wyrm regains 10 hit points.

Wyrm Strike ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The wyrm uses *bite* twice, making each attack against a different target.

Move Actions

Serpent Strike ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The wyrm shifts half its speed.

Minor Actions

Mesmerizing Dread (fear, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +6 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the wyrm slides the target 3 squares. The target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses until the end of the wyrm's next turn.

Shadow Form ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: The wyrm gains insubstantial and phasing. While in this form, the wyrm gains a +5 bonus to Stealth checks but cannot attack. It can resume its normal form as a free action.

Triggered Actions

Silk Strands (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy hits the wyrm with a melee or close attack.
Effect: Before the attack, the wyrm shifts 1 square.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 3 (triggering enemy); +6 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 3 acid damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).

Skills Stealth +10

Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 18 (+5)	**Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 7 (-1)	**Cha** 11 (+1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** -

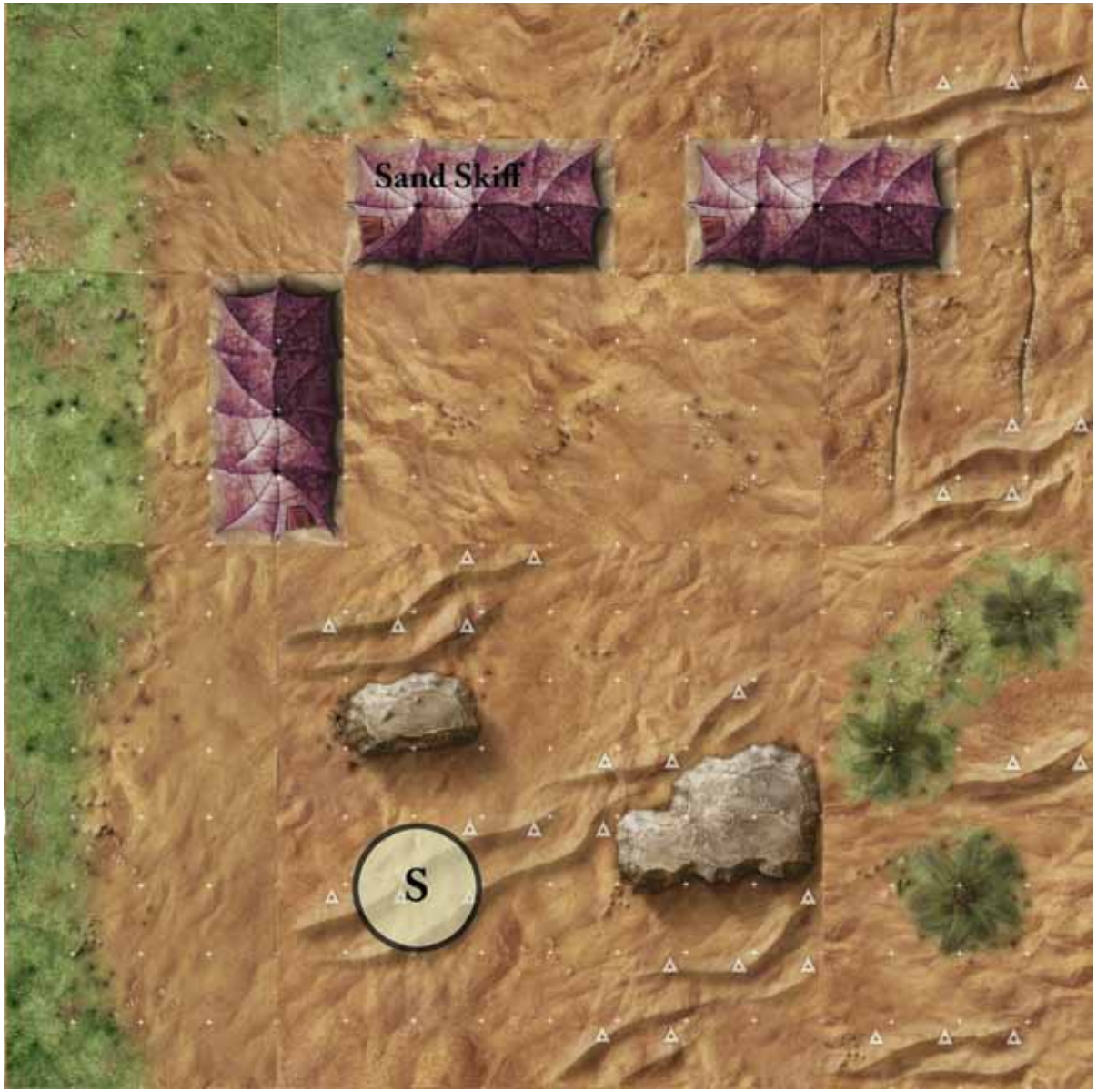
Features of the Area

Illumination: Night.

Boulders: The boulders are 10 feet high. A DC 10 Athletics check is required to climb atop one.

Dunes: The dunes are difficult terrain, as marked on the map. A Medium character who falls prone in a space with dunes gains total concealment to ranged attacks.

Sand Skiffs: The sand skiffs sit roughly 2 feet off the ground, leaving room for a prone character to crawl beneath one. A character beneath a sand skiff has superior cover (-5 to attack rolls).



Encounter 3-2: The Terror of Tsalaxa

Encounter Level 6 (XP 1,250)

Setup

2 crodlus (C)
Tyron Tsalaxa (T)
1 war crodlu (W)
2 veteran assassins (V)

Tactics

Tyron and his assassins make good use of their crodlus' mobility during the fight. When combat begins, they spend a standard action to open fire on the characters with ranged attacks and then use their mount's movement to stay out of melee. If the characters prove to have potent ranged attacks of their own, the veteran assassins dismount and send their crodlus into melee with the characters. The beasts have been trained for this type of combat and eagerly *pounce* into the fray. The veteran assassins continue to fire their crossbows, moving steadily forward until they are within melee range, at which time they switch to their long swords.

Tyron keeps his mount and snipes with his hand crossbow until the veteran assassins enter melee. At that time he spurs his mount into a charge and uses *pouncing mount* on a character that appears wounded. Then, like his men, he dismounts and fights apart from his crodlu. He seeks out the most potent melee-oriented character to engage. Tyron holds onto his hand crossbow and uses *double sting* each round, all the while shifting about the battle field to gain combat advantage through a flank where possible.

Tyron is fatally overconfident in his ability; he fights to the death. Even when bloodied and obviously losing, he refuses to believe he can be beaten. The veteran assassins also refuse to surrender but fight desperately to the end.

2 Crodlus (C)	**Level 3 Brute**
Large natural beast (reptile)	XP 150
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +3
AC 15, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13	**Perception** +1
Speed 8	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Beak** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage.	
⊕ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.	
↓ **Pounce** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The crodlu can move its speed. Whether or not it moves, it can use *beak* and *claws*, making each attack against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target also falls prone	
Str 19 (+5) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+1)	
Con 15 (+3) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 8 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** -	

Tyron Tsalaxa (T)	**Level 5 Elite Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 400
HP 102; **Bloodied** 51	**Initiative** +9
AC 19, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15	**Perception** +3
Speed 6	
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
Combat Advantage	
Tyron deals 1d6 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to him.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Rapier** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage, and Tyron shifts 1 square.	
⊕ **Hand Crossbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
↓ **Double Sting** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: Tyron makes a *rapier* and a *hand crossbow* attack, each against a different target. He does not draw an opportunity attack from the target of the *rapier* attack when making the *hand crossbow* attack.	
Minor Actions	
Gaudy Feint ✦ **Recharge** ⚅	
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in burst); +6 vs. Will	
Hit: The target grants combat advantage to Tyron until the end of his next turn.	
Skills Bluff +9, Insight +8, Stealth +10	
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 13 (+3) **Cha** 15 (+4)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common	
Equipment leather armor, obsidian rapier, hand crossbow, 10 poisoned bolts	

2 Veteran Assassins (V) **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, humanoid XP 175

HP 54; **Bloodied** 27 **Initiative** +7
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 **Perception** +4
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bone Longsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage. If the target is granting combat advantage to the veteran assassin, the target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

⊹ **Crossbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage.

⸸ **No Escape** (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Requirement: The veteran assassin must have combat advantage against the target.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage, and the target falls prone and is slowed (save ends).

Minor Actions

Flanking Step ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The veteran assassin can shift 1 square as a minor action if the shift puts it into a flanking position against an enemy.

Skills Athletics +10, Bluff +8, Stealth +10
Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 13 (+3) **Cha** 13 (+3)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment bone longsword, crossbow, 10 bolts

War Crodlu (W) **Level 5 Brute**
Large natural beast (reptile) XP 200

HP 76; **Bloodied** 38 **Initiative** +5
AC 17, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15 **Perception** +3
Speed 8

Standard Actions

⊕ **Beak** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage.

⊕ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage.

⸸ **Pounce** ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The crodlu can move its speed. Whether or not it moves, it can use *beak* and *claws*, making each attack against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target also falls prone

Triggered Actions

Pouncing Mount (mount) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The crodlu charges an enemy while mounted by a friendly rider of 5th level or higher.
Effect (No Action): The crodlu's rider can make a melee basic attack as a free action against the target of the crodlu's charge.

Str 20 (+7) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 3 (-2) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** -

Features of the Area

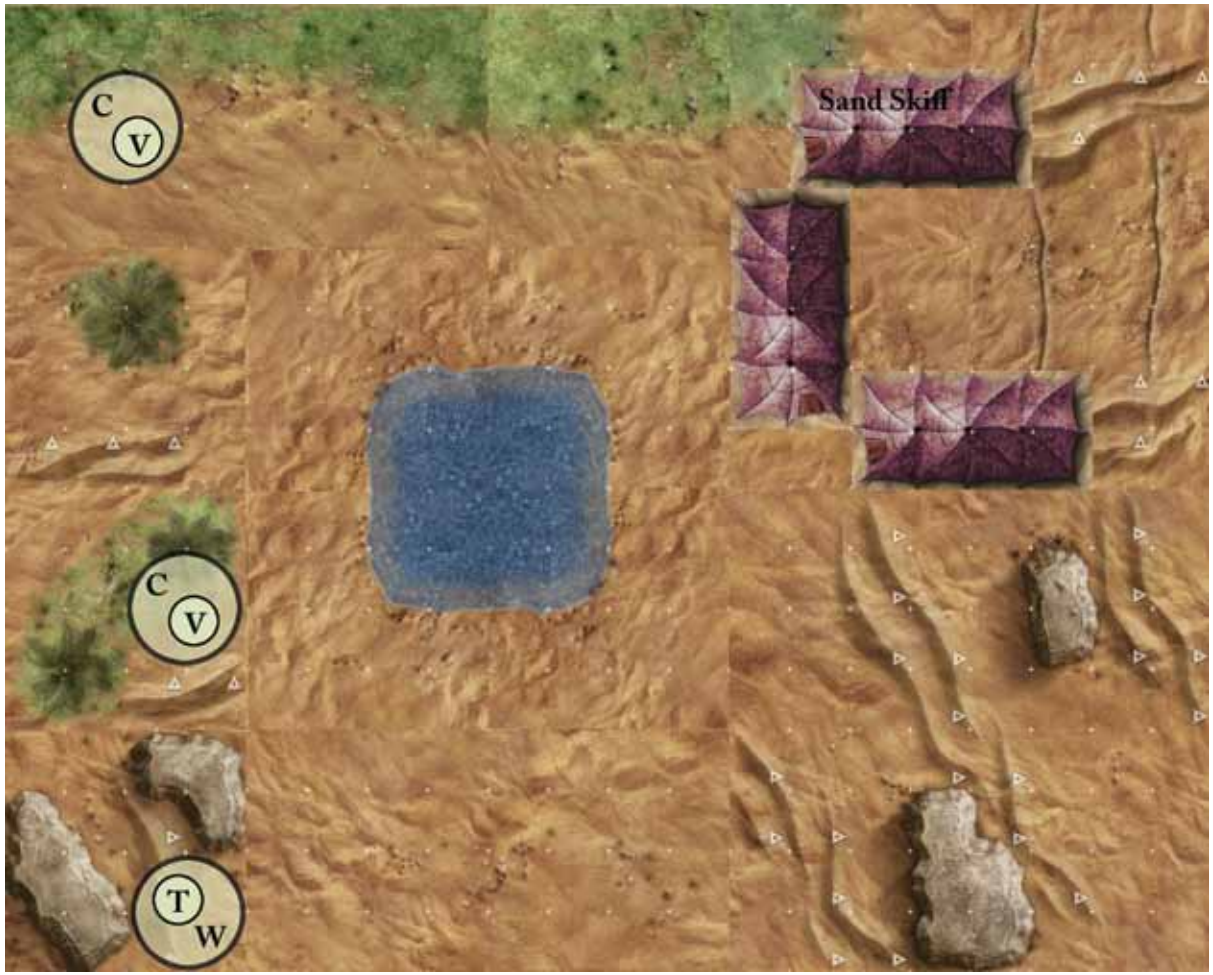
Illumination: Daylight.

Boulders: The boulders are 10 feet high. A DC 10 Athletics check is required to climb atop one.

Dry Oasis: This area was once a vibrant oasis, but the water ran dry years ago. The pool is filled with a thick layer of silt which is very difficult to move through and counts as difficult terrain.

Dunes: The dunes are difficult terrain, as marked on the map. A Medium character who falls prone in a space with dunes gains total concealment to ranged attacks.

Sand Skiffs: The sand skiffs sit roughly 2 feet off the ground, leaving room for a prone character to crawl beneath one. A character beneath a sand skiff has superior cover (-5 to attack rolls).



About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel has been a professional game designer since 2005. His recent author credits include *The Lost Cistern of Aravek*, *Chaos Scar: Crawling Fane*, and *Chaos Scar: Dead by Dawn*. Aeryn currently lives in Seattle, Washington with his wife Melissa, a nongamer whose tolerance for her husband's geekery borders on the supernatural.

Campaign Workshop: Hero Battle: Elminster

An Encounter for Paragon or Epic Player Characters

By Chris Sims

illustration by Alexi Aparin

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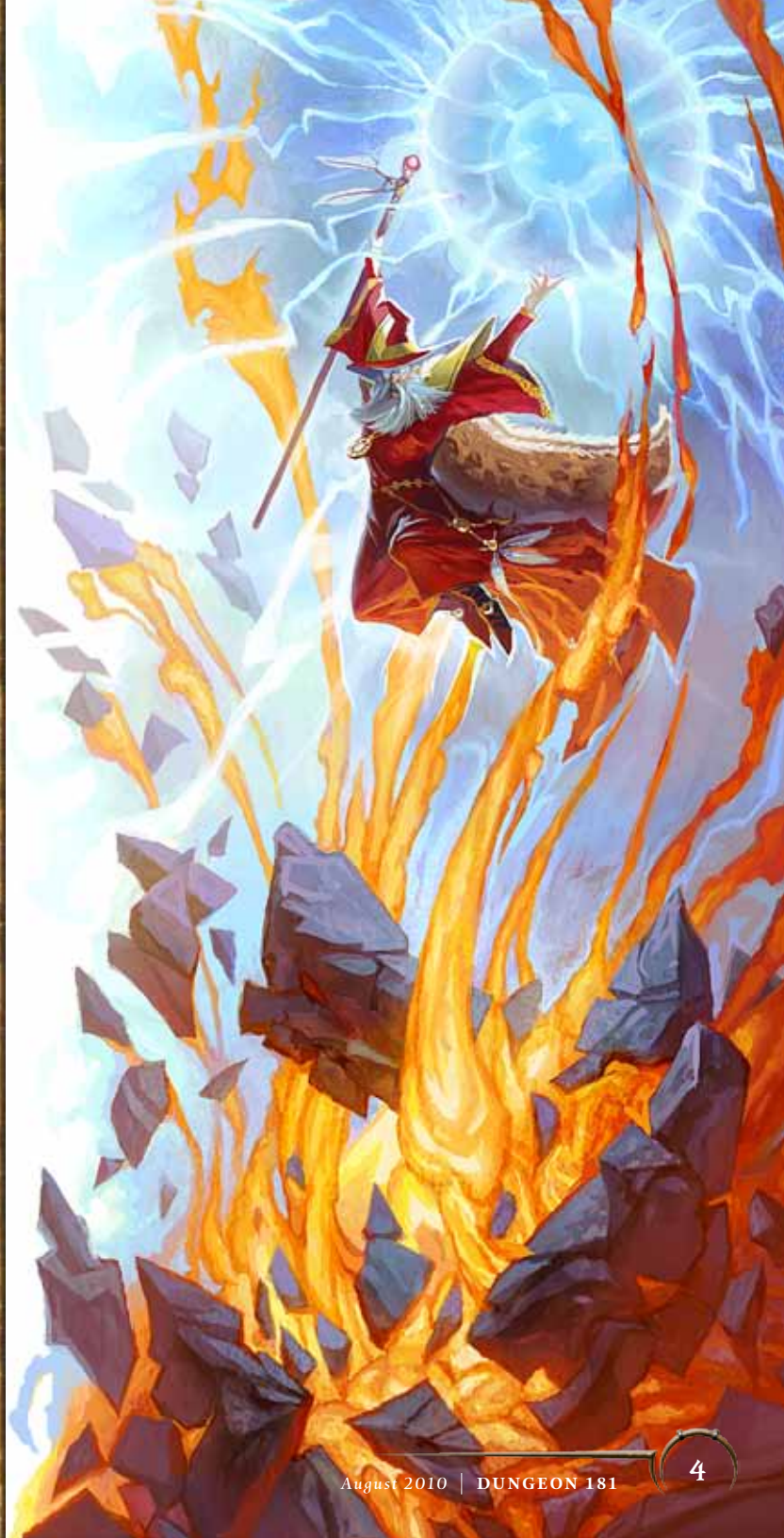
Learn ye well the lesson of the pebble that begets a landslide. Likewise a single betrayal unleashed the Spellplague, whose consequences yet dance and stagger across Toril, and beyond.

–Elminster, 1479 DR



Within Shadowdale dwells a living legend, a man who has seen much of what Toril and its connected worlds offer. From humble origins, he has been a warrior, a brigand, a thief, a wizard, a devotee of the gods, and even, at one time, a woman. He has walked among the heavens, and he has been through hell. The love of a goddess raised him up, and the treachery of another deity laid him low again. In countless ways, Faerûn followed him. Still Elminster's name falls from lips in the recounting of mighty deeds—his own and those he has aided or encouraged.

Mystra's death at the hands of Cyric stilled one immortal heart and broke another. The unraveling of the magic Mystra kept bridled in her Weave undid more than a few mages, and it unhinged the minds of more. With her undoing nearly came Elminster. This loss of power has taken its toll on the Old Sage. Wanting little more than to be left alone, he now dwells in the Silverhand farm in Shadowdale with no one less than the erstwhile Witch Queen of Aglarond, Alassra Shentrantra Silverhand, the Simbul.

Rumors have said as much, but the rumors also assume that the Simbul takes care of Elminster. The reverse is actually true. The Spellplague left the Simbul weak of mind, hardly able to contain the energies within her. To help the woman that has become his lover, Elminster makes and acquires items of power for her to consume and stave off the madness her condition brings for a while longer. He has little time for anything else, treating almost any visitor as an unwelcome distraction.

This scenario assumes much about the nature of the Simbul's sickness, and it presupposes that Elminster finally fails in his attempts to help her.

Encounter Background

The Simbul went mad, and the Sage of Shadowdale was forced to defend himself against her hunger. His victory in that grim battle might be worse than if he had lost. Elminster destroyed the Simbul. In so doing, however, he unleashed what she held within her. Like a victim of his own bard's tongue with his words about the Spellplague in the Year of the Ageless One, Elminster has become infected with remnants of the cataclysm that occurred long ago. At present, he too hungers.

Now the man who willingly gave up villainy has been unwillingly cast into the role of villain again. He has become a threat to the Dalelands, and left unchecked, he might become a greater threat still. The characters in your campaign have to face this fallen myth to end the threat. But the clever and the wise might save the Old Sage from himself.

What the Characters Know

Shadowdale folk witnessed from afar the arcane inferno that was the battle between Elminster and the Simbul. Magical elements lit the sky with their varied colors for a long while one summer night. Thunder pealed and unnatural sounds echoed through the dale. Silence finally settled in. The world held its breath.

Then a vortex of dark clouds and violet fire erupted in the same place. An inhuman scream thundered for miles, waking those who had snatched some sleep after the earlier disturbance. An eerie storm raged across the dale that night, pouring rain so thick that some said all the gods were weeping.

Everyone nearby knew the location of these events—the old Silverhand farm. A few folks were even brave enough to go see what had happened. They never returned. Dalefolk also witnessed an iron dragon headed to the site, but no one saw it come back.

The fey of Shadowdale then detected a disturbing development. Something was tapping the geomagical energy around the River Ashaba. The drawing of power from this source has become dangerous to the land, and small natural disasters—tremors, sinkholes, and spontaneous mote eruptions—have started to occur. Strange amorphous beings, possibly sharns, have been seen in the Druid's Grove. Localized plaguelands have sprung up only to disappear in short order.

Lady Addee Ulphor sends for well-known heroes to look into these occurrences. Investigation of the areas where strangeness has occurred is needed. However, priority goes to the task of seeing what happened at the Silverhand farm.

What's Happening?

Elminster has absorbed the Spellplague energies the Simbul once kept in check. Now he is crazy. In his insanity, he has learned he can tap the land for sustenance and power. His tapping into the geomagical power has begun to infect the nearby land with what he carries in his body, creating warping effects like those of the Spellplague. The infection is spreading.

In his state, despite his normal goodness, Elminster knows only foes. He suspects anyone who comes is a greedy usurper of his rightful property. Those who face him, such as the characters, have no time to negotiate. Death was the fate of those who came before. Even the iron dragon Angkus failed to escape the Old Sage's wrath.

Silverhand Farm

Encounter Level 21 (12,000 XP)

Setup

Elminster (E)

The characters come to the scene from the area marked as their approach. Due to his connection to the land, Elminster knows they've come.

When the characters see the area, read:

If this woodland clearing ever enclosed a farm, no sign remains besides what could be a pond on the far side. In place of a house and outbuildings is a scorched crater. Plants and trees are burned and flattened near the depression. In the center of the crater, at its deepest point, are the blasted remains of a dragon. Around the bones are runes and stone nodules that look skull-like. Small bursts of blue fire dance on the runes and the stones.

In the center of it all is an old, bearded man with white hair. Red robes hang in tatters about him, revealing a muscular form. An ornate scabbard hangs from his ruined belt, but the blade is in his right hand, point in the ground. He eyes you darkly, blue light flickering in his eyes. He snatches a smoking pipe from his mouth with a clack against his teeth.

"I've told ye to leave me be. Now ye've come for my power, have ye? Ye'll not have it!"

Elminster attacks immediately.

Arcana Check (Minor Action; DC 23):
Elminster is using the arcane arrangement of runes to draw on the geomagical energy moving through the area. Elminster is carrying a huge amount of arcane power, having drawn it from the magic of the environment. He is sure to be more potent while he stays in that mystical nexus. Grounding yourself in the nexus could be beneficial.

The character knows Arcana or Endurance allows the grounding in the nexus.

Elminster Aumar — **Level 19 Solo Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human — XP 12,000

HP 728; **Bloodied** 364 — **Initiative** +13
AC 33, **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30 — **Perception** +14
Speed 6, teleport 6
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Mystic's Clarity ✦ Aura 3
While Elminster is not bloodied, enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to saving throws, and Elminster scores a critical hit against them on a natural 19-20.

Rage of the Sage
While Elminster is bloodied, all his defenses become 30, and his standard action attack powers deal 2d10 extra damage and 5 extra ongoing damage.

Sage's Alacrity
Elminster makes two initiative checks, and he takes a full turn on each initiative result. He receives one immediate action between the end of one of his turns and the start of another.

Sage's Countermagic
At the end of each of his turns, Elminster ends any dazing, immobilizing, restraining, slowing, or stunning effect on him.

Standard Actions

Thunderstrike Longsword (thunder, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +24 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 15 thunder damage (save ends), and Elminster pushes the target up to 4 squares and knocks it prone.
Miss: Elminster pushes the target up to 2 squares.

Arcane Fire (fire, force) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +22 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 7 force damage, and ongoing 15 fire damage (save ends).
Effect: The target is slowed until the end of Elminster's next turn. If the target is already slowed and taking ongoing damage, it is instead immobilized (save ends).

Ragefire Nova (fear, fire, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** 6
Attack: Close burst 2, close burst 3 while bloodied (creatures in burst); +22 vs. Will
Hit: 4d10 + 16 fire damage, and ongoing 15 psychic damage (save ends), and Elminster pushes the target up to its speed + 1.
Miss: Half damage, and Elminster pushes the target 3 squares.

Minor Actions

Fire Strike (fire, force) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round while not bloodied)
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in blast); +22 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d12 + 5 fire and force damage.

Change Shape (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Elminster alters his physical form and clothing to appear as a Medium or Small humanoid until he uses *change shape* again or until he drops to 0 hit points. To assume a specific individual's form, Elminster must have seen that individual. Other creatures can make a DC 40 Insight check to discern that the form is a disguise.

Triggered Actions

Elemental Intuitive ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy takes ongoing damage of a type to which it is resistant.
Effect (Immediate Reaction; Immediate Interrupt while bloodied): Close burst 10 (triggering enemy in burst); Elminster changes the damage type to another to which the enemy is not resistant and imposes a -5 penalty to the saving throw against that damage.

Skills Arcana +21, History +21, Nature +19

Str 13 (+10)	Dex 18 (+13)	Wis 20 (+14)
Con 22 (+15)	Int 25 (+16)	Cha 17 (+12)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** all
Equipment robes, longsword, pipe

Geomagical Configuration

The area within, but not including, the runed squares (see "Features of the Area") grants Elminster blindsight across the whole map. Within it, he reduces any push, pull, or slide effect against him by 1 square and can attempt a saving throw against being knocked prone, remaining standing if he saves. He also maintains *mystic's clarity* while bloodied while within the area. No one can teleport into the geomagical configuration.

Arcana or Endurance (Minor Action; DC 22): The character taps into the geomagical configuration until the start of his or her next turn, gaining the reduction of forced movement and the saving throw against being knocked prone, as well as the ability to ignore the saving throw penalty of *mystic's alacrity*. A character who already has a capability, such as the dwarf's Stand Your Ground, gains 1 extra square of forced-movement reduction and +4 to saving throws against being knocked prone. The character can make a similar check to trigger second wind as a minor action. Once a character does this, further checks to tap the configuration are impossible for the rest of the encounter.

Tactics

Elminster fights like a mage unafraid of his attackers. He prefers to stay in the geomagical configuration. When he becomes surrounded, however, he uses *rage-fire nova* or teleport to escape. He moves to put a cliff between him and the characters. After he draws the characters to him, he returns to occupy the geomagical configuration.

Conclusion

Characters who subdue rather than kill Elminster can attempt to cure the Old Sage of his madness. Such a task requires a Remove Affliction ritual against a 19th-level effect. Elminster then has the Simbul's hunger for magic, which is most easily sated with magic items. Curing him of this affliction is an adventure in and of itself. Pulling off such a feat is accomplishing something Elminster couldn't do for the Simbul.

Expanding the Encounter

Clearing Shadowdale of the effects of Elminster's doings requires the characters to hunt down the anomalous effects and unusual creatures attracted to the area. A whole adventure could revolve around this incident. It might involve the sharns and other plaguechanged creatures, as well as angry fey.

Campaign Arc: If the characters allow Elminster to escape this encounter, he eventually leaves Shadowdale, heading east or south. He ends up in Halruaa or Deep Imaskar, leaving ruin in his wake. This arc is sure to involve the sharns, the Order of Blue Fire, and eventually the Masters of Absolute Accord. For more information on these subjects, see Forgotten Realms® *Campaign Guide*.

About the Author

Chris Sims has played roleplaying games for 30 years, and he has helped produce games for nearly 10. Before he laired in the Seattle exurbs, he was an editor/designer at Wizards of the Coast. There, he worked Duel Masters, Dungeons & Dragons, and Magic: The Gathering. Now he blogs about the D&D game for critical-hits.com and is up to no good as a game-industry freelancer.

Features of the Area

Cliffs: Along the west and southeast, these escarpments (Athletics DC 16 to climb) are 25 feet high. The ridges to the east are only 15 feet high.

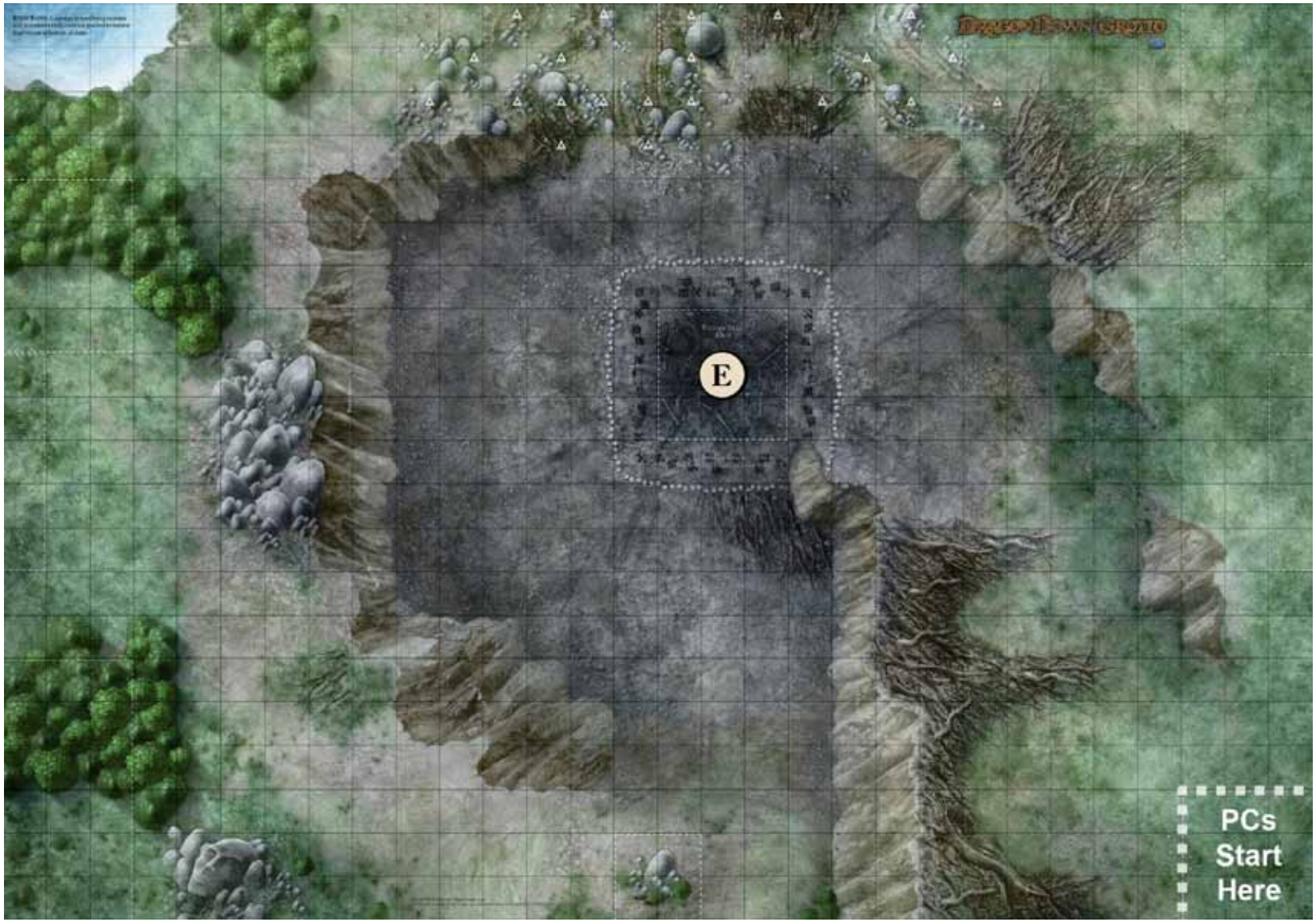
Dragon Remains: Each square of this mass of blasted bones is difficult terrain.

Flattened Trees: These blasted trunks and branches, hardened by arcane energy, are difficult terrain. A creature knocked prone on them takes 1d6 damage.

Rocks: Rocky areas marked with triangles are difficult terrain. Boulders without triangles are 5-foot low obstacles (Athletics DC 12 to climb). A creature knocked prone on them takes 1d6 damage.

Runed Squares: These runes and the skull-like rock nodules around them are harmless to intruders (Arcana DC 31 to discern).

Trees: Forested squares are difficult terrain and lightly obscured.



CHAOS SCAR™

THE SLAVER'S STONE

AN ADVENTURE FOR 5TH LEVEL CHARACTERS

By Robert J. Schwalb

illustration by William O'Connor ✦ cartography by Mike Schley

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"The Slaver's Stone" is an adventure for five 5th-level characters. What appears to be a straightforward mission to rescue abducted folk from the settlement of Cled gets derailed by a betrayal.

BACKGROUND

A few days ago, a wereboar slaver named Magrak Ironjaw attacked the remote village of Cled to capture prisoners he intended to sell as slaves. Magrak, his own troops, plus those of the Proud Boys bandits, led the prisoners across the King's Wall and into the scar, bound for the Slaver's Stone not far from the valley mouth. There, he hopes to offload the chattel to an orc chieftain who is known to be a good customer for slavers.

Hot on the wereboar's heels, however, is Cluff Maclire, chief and warleader at Cled. He nearly caught the slaver, but lost Magrak's trail at the King's Wall. Cluff then traveled to Restwell Keep, where he hopes to round up support from Lord Drysdale to rescue his people.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins at Restwell Keep. There, the characters run across Cluff, who asks them for help after being rebuffed by the bailiff, who wants no trouble with the notorious slaver. Cluff, with his own warriors, the characters, and a guide named Zestren, heads into the Chaos Scar to pick up the bandits' trail. The expedition winds up at the Crossroads where the Proud Boys, who parted ways with the wereboar, are camped. From them, the characters learn where Magrak was headed.

The adventurers can then move to intercept the slaver band. They nearly catch up with them at the Stone Forest, a blighted area of petrified trees, but are delayed by several harpies. Magrak, it appears, offered the harpies a sacrifice—a young woman—to gain safe passage through their territory. If the characters rescue her, they can learn important information about how to defeat the wereboar before he gets to the Slaver's Stone. That night, however, Zestren makes off with the captive and hauls her to the oracle at Cloven Skull. Cluff, dismayed, must choose to either follow the traitor or to push on to rescue the greater number of his folk.

PLANTING THE SEEDS

If your group is not quite ready to handle this adventure, consider planting the following seeds so that when the characters hit 5th level, they'll have extra incentive to hunt down Magrak.

Maclire Clansperson: A character might have been born in Cled. Cluff is assumed to be human, but you can swap out his race to match a character in the party. Ties to the clan should be enough to draw the character into the plot.

Magrak Encounter: The characters might meet Magrak in a tavern where he treats them poorly. Or they might encounter his handiwork when they discover a sacked village or a burned homestead. Because Magrak is likely more powerful than the adventurers, efforts to confront him should be difficult and include side treks to lure the adventurers onto different paths until they are ready for this adventure.

Zestren: Drop Zestren's level to one lower than the characters' and have him accompany them as a companion character for a few encounters. This establishes a rapport between the party and the traitor.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF TIME

Cautious adventurers might take one or more extended rests during the adventure. This is bad news for the poor prisoners, because the villains aren't going to put their plans on hold for 6 hours. Luckily, extended resting shouldn't be necessary thanks to the Companions (see below). Still, the adventurers might take their time, and if they do, they face specific consequences.

First Extended Rest: Cluff and the minions abandon the party unless the characters can persuade them otherwise. You should run this as a complexity 1 skill challenge involving DC 17 Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate checks. Success means Cluff sticks around. Failure means he doesn't, resorting to combat if he must.

Second Extended Rest: The captive at the Stone Forest is eaten. Add 1 orc chieftain (*Monster Manual*, page 204) and 8 orc warriors (*Monster Manual*, page 203) to Tactical Encounter 3: Chain Gang.

Third Extended Rest: Magrak sells all the prisoners at the Slaver's Stone and is gone by the time the adventurers reach the place. The characters have failed. They might rescue the prisoners from the orc chieftain, though how this might play out is up to you.

TREASURE

"The Slaver's Stone" awards six treasure parcels from party level 5. Items should come from the players' wish lists. If the characters near 6th level by the last encounter, add the remaining parcels for their level to make sure they are properly equipped. In that case, add the extra parcels to "Chain Gang" and "Eyes in the Darkness."

Parcel	Contents	Location
10	110 gp	Bounty on Magrak's Head
4	Level 6 item	"Local Color"
5	2 potions of healing, 350 gp	"Local Color"
8	300 gp, 400 sp	"Dung and Feathers"
7	298 gp, 396 sp, 240 cp	"Chain Gang"
9	Potion of lifeshield (AV 188), 80 gp	"Guardians of the Skull"
1	Level 9 magic item	"Eyes in the Dark"

Zestren

Zestren joins Cluff Maclire's expedition at Restwell Keep. He claims to know the land around the Scar well. Zestren has an ulterior motive in joining the group, however—he intends on betraying them.

The eladrin is desperate to learn the fate of Riddle, his lover who was lost during another adventure long ago. Riddle was swallowed up in a dark portal beneath a ruined keep somewhere near Winterhaven. Zestren has spent his time trying to recover his lover with little luck. His efforts eventually put him on the path to the Lake Oracle who lived just outside the Scar in a cave known as the Cloven Skull. Zestren convinced himself the oracle was the only path to Riddle and thus sought her out.

When he reached the site, he was barred passage to her by a pair of wicked ghouls who demanded a living sacrifice before they would allow him passage. Zestren withdrew and stewed on their demand the long weeks since. The more he thought on it, the more convinced he became that it was the only way. When he heard of Cluff's predicament, he was certain it would give him the means to acquire a suitable sacrifice while still doing some good.

Zestren plans to abduct a rescued prisoner at some point during the journey and bring the captive to the ghouls as a sacrifice. Zestren is not completely committed to the plan and has not yet worked out how it will happen, so he is not beyond saving. If the opportunity presents itself, however, Zestren will take it and complete his slide into evil.

Minor Quest: Stop Zestren's Treachery

Unless stopped, Zestren steals a captive and makes off for the Cloven Skull to learn what secrets he can from the oracle. The adventurers can foil this plot by uncovering his true motives or stopping him from escaping with a prisoner.

Quest XP: 200 for the group.

Companions

Two companion characters, Cluff and Zestren, plus ten minions join the characters' adventuring group. Divide the minions between the players but consider controlling the two companion characters yourself. If you have too much to handle already, you can assign these characters to the players, but be sure to keep Zestren's motives secret. A handout at the end of this adventure contains all the statistics for these characters. If Zestren becomes an enemy, use his statistics as given on page 11.

The companions and minions add a new dimension to a traditional adventure, but if they prove too much to handle, you can adjust the adventure to run it without them. In that case, Cluff comes to Restwell Keep alone, hires the adventurers, and sends them on their way. Zestren appears at the Slaver's Stone to steal a prisoner to give to the guardians.

Cluff Maclire

Cluff Maclire is a middle-aged, lanky, pale human warrior with stringy brown hair going to gray. He wears a tartan kilt and a leather jack studded with metal spikes. He carries a bastard sword in a sheath hanging down the middle of his back. He is a plain-spoken man with little patience for nonsense and no tolerance for cowardice. He has vowed to kill Magrak Ironjaw and save his people even if it costs his own life.

Zestren

Zestren is a graceful eladrin warrior dressed in traveler's clothing and chainmail covered by a long, blue-gray cloak. He carries a longsword in a scabbard hanging from his leather belt. He says little and appears to disdain humans.

Something about Zestren

The characters have several opportunities to talk with Zestren before his betrayal. Learning more about him and winning his friendship can reveal what he intends. This skill challenge takes place over several hours and can be run during short rests or through roleplaying while the party travels.

Level: 4 (XP 175)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Arcana, Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight

Arcana (DC 17; standard action; 1 success, maximum 1 success): The character identifies Zestren as a swordmage and recalls something useful about swordmage training, which can provide the character

with a topic to discuss with Zestren (and allow for further bonding). Swordmages gain a +5 bonus to this check.

Bluff (DC 12; 1 hour; 1 success, maximum 2 successes): A character uses false pretenses to learn more about Zestren. The first success reveals that he was an adventurer whose party met a terrible end beneath a ruined keep. A second success softens him up and he reveals a bit about Riddle, his lost love, though he keeps secret his efforts to recover her. A failed Bluff check results in two failures, closes off the Bluff skill for the duration of the challenge, and increases all other DCs by 2.

Diplomacy (DC 12; 1 hour; 1 success, maximum 4 successes): A character tries to befriend Zestren. The first two successful checks reveal the same information as described under Bluff. The third check reveals a general dislike for humans over the fact that a human was responsible for Riddle's apparent demise. A third or fourth success by the same character establishes a strong connection so that Zestren does not attack that character unless he is first attacked.

Insight (DC 7; 1 hour; 1 success, maximum 2 successes): The character senses that Zestren is uneasy, and the uneasiness grows as the party travels into the Chaos Scar. A successful check by 5 or more grants an extra success and also identifies that Zestren is grieving. A character gains a bonus to Diplomacy checks made during this challenge equal to the number of successes earned from Insight checks.

Secondary Skill: Arcana

Arcana (DC 17; standard action; +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks): A character mentions something about magic that impresses Zestren. A successful check grants the character a +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks for the duration of the challenge.

Success: The character or characters gain Zestren's trust and he divulges his whole sorry tale, including his terrible plan. He accepts any solution the characters put forward—killing the ghouls, offering a villain as a sacrifice, or something else.

Failure: Zestren goes through with the plan. Also, add 1 cackling harpy to Tactical Encounter 2: Stone Forest.

GETTING STARTED

The adventure begins in Restwell Keep (see "The Keep on the Chaos Scar" in *Dungeon* 176). The adventurers can be at the Keep for a variety of reasons, such as picking up supplies, gathering information about another lead, or simply taking some well-deserved downtime between expeditions. Restwell Keep is an excellent base of operations, and likely the characters are not strangers to the place.

Once the adventurers conduct all their business, introduce them to Cluff Maclire. Cluff is at the following locations at the indicated times.

1. Main Gate (late morning): Cluff and his warriors enter the community to speak with the bailiff.

2a. Bailiff's Tower (late morning): The bailiff, who wants nothing to do with Magrak Ironjaw, informs Cluff that he intends to send out a force to deal with the slaver and then never does.

9. Fountain Square (midday): Cluff makes a scene by haranguing locals about Magrak Ironjaw and what he did to Cluff's folk—namely how the brute stole their women and burned down their huts. After a few minutes of this, Kendon Longstrider and a handful of guards come in and break up the assembly to scattered applause. Cluff storms away to drink off his rage at the Stumbling Giant.

11. The Stumbling Giant (afternoon until morning): Cluff and company knock back grog at the Giant. As the hours wear on, their sobriety diminishes until the entire band passes out sometime after midnight.

TALKING WITH CLUFF

The characters should run across Cluff in the Keep. Make it clear that he's an unhappy man on a mission. Characters who approach him should learn the following bits of information.

- Cluff Maclire is the chief of Clan Maclire, a proud warrior tribe with a settlement several leagues to the north "as the crow flies."
- A few days back while Cluff and the warriors were orc-hunting, a coward named Magrak Ironjaw raided the settlement, "burning all our homes and stealing the women who chose to stay behind." He knows it was Magrak because "the women gave as good as they got and the coward left his dead and dying behind for our questioning."
- Cluff is sure he can find the slaver at the Crossroads. He intends to head there first thing in the morning and "give that brigand the killing he's earned."

Any interest expressed by the characters about Cluff's predicament results in the chieftain pushing hard to recruit the adventurers to help him. At first, he runs with the honor bit—"An honorable warrior could see the righteousness of our cause." If that fails, he resorts to guilt—"You wouldn't doom innocents to an unspeakable fate, would you?" Finally, he settles for insults—"Well, I can see you lack the stones to go with *real* warriors. When we get back, I'll teach you the basics of how to handle a spear." If none of those

efforts works, Cluff and Zestren leave with their small group of warriors but without the characters.

Three days later, one of those warriors returns to describe how the expedition ended in ruin. Led by their guide Zestren, a few of the best hunters sneaked into the slavers' camp at night and freed just one person, a young woman. Cluff hoped that she could provide information that would help the warriors defeat the slavers and release all the captives. Before the warriors could strike in force, harpies ambushed them at the Stone Forest. During that fight, Zestren and the rescued woman ran off, leaving everyone else to their fate.

As word of this spreads, Lord Drysdale raises the bounty for Magrak Ironjaw's head to 110 gp and also offers 50 gp for Zestren's head.

MAJOR QUEST: RESCUE MACLIRE'S ABDUCTED KIN

The characters must track down Magrak Ironjaw and free the captives before he sells them to the orc chieftain.

Quest XP: 200 per per character.

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

Before heading off to confront the wereboar at the Crossroads, the characters might be keen to ask around a bit to learn what they can.

CLUFF MACLIRE

A loudmouth and braggart, he talks big but no one around here has ever heard of him before (DC 7 Streetwise). The Maclire clansmen are fringe-dwellers, having little to do with civilized folks. Funny how they come crying for help when they have to pay for their independence (DC 12 Streetwise).

CROSSROADS

Never heard of it (DC 7 Streetwise). Oh, that's a nasty place all right. I hear them humanoids in the Scar string up those who offend them from the Gibbet Tree (DC 12 Streetwise). It's a bad place to linger, sure, but it's also about the closest one comes to civilization in that terrible place. Lots of bad folk meet there (DC 17 Streetwise).

MAGRAK IRONJAW

Magrak Ironjaw is a warrior, slaver, and bandit. Because of his depredations, Lord Drysdale has offered a 110 gp bounty for Ironjaw's head. Few people have tried to hunt him down, and those who have never return (DC 7 Streetwise). Magrak is a wereboar, a breed of lycanthrope that can transform into a horrid dire boar (DC 12 Streetwise). He runs with a mixed band of orcs, half-orcs, and other scum. Because he provides a needed commodity (slaves), he comes and goes as he pleases in the Chaos Scar (DC 17).

ZESTREN

Zestren is new to the keep, having been around only for a few days. He keeps to himself and says little to anyone (DC 12 Streetwise). He perks up when anyone mentions Magrak Ironjaw (DC 17 Streetwise). Some say he's the only survivor of an adventuring group that met their match in a dungeon near Winterhaven (DC 22 Streetwise).

ON THE WAY

Reaching the Crossroads involves following the old trail toward the Chaos Scar. The characters might encounter a few locals along the way. Consider injecting one or two of the following encounters during the trek to the Crossroads.

ESCAPED PRISONER

One of Magrak's prisoners, a handsome young woman from Cled, escaped the wereboar. Unfortunately, Magrak dispatched his warriors to chase her down. Once the characters defeat the pursuers, then find the woman, Allysen can tell the adventurers that Magrak is headed for some place called the Slaver's Stone, though she doesn't know where that is. Cluff, if with the party, sends two warriors to escort her back to their lands.

Level 4 Encounter (XP 900)

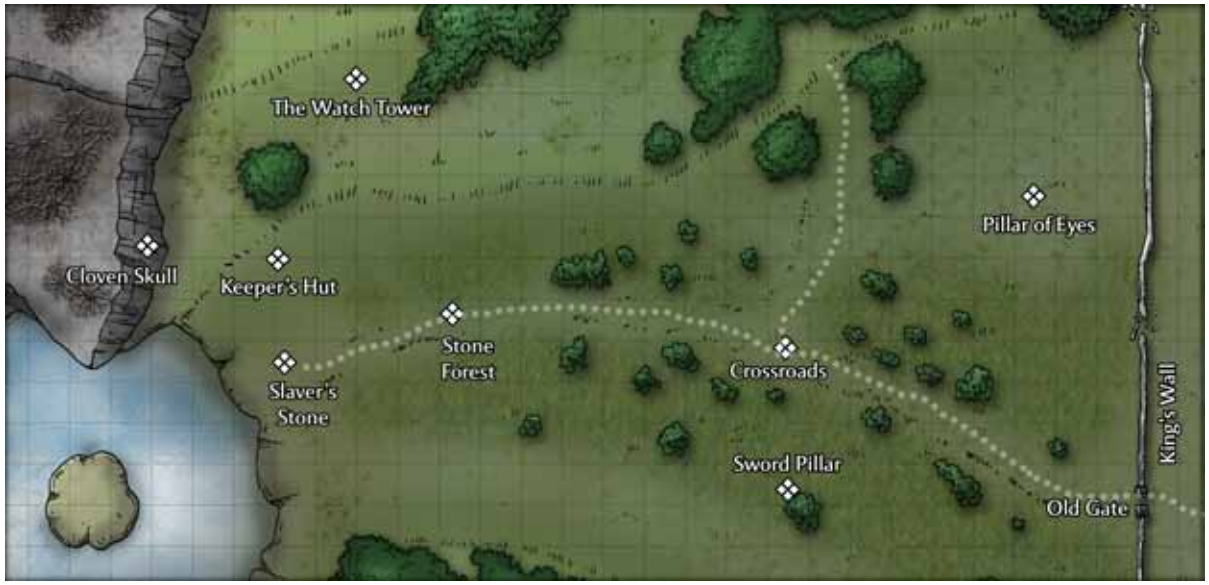
- 6 orc raiders (level 3 skirmisher, *Monster Manual* page 203)

HOWLING PACK

A gnoll band spills across the countryside to attack the adventurers. They are undeterred by the characters' greater numbers. The gnolls' erratic behavior comes from the meal they made on strange mushrooms found in a nearby glade.

Level 5 Encounter (XP 1,200)

- 2 gnoll claw fighters (level 6 skirmisher, *Monster Manual* page 132)
- 1 gnoll huntmaster (level 5 artillery, *Monster Manual* page 132)
- 4 hyenas (level 2 skirmisher, *Monster Manual* page 166)



Roaming Dead

A reckless necromancer was killed when he tried to raise an undead army. The results of his foolish ritual now roam the Chaos Scar.

Level 4 Encounter (XP 900)

- 2 wights (level 5 skirmisher, *Monster Manual* page 262)
- 20 decrepit skeletons (level 1 minion, *Monster Manual* page 234)

1. CROSSROADS

The Crossroads are beyond the King's Wall, about halfway to the Chaos Scar, at the juncture of the main trail and a second, smaller trail that leads to the north. Veterans of the Chaos Scar might have been here before (see "The Crossroads" in *Dungeon* 176 for an overview of the site) and might have left a mark here—such as killing all the locals and burning the place to the ground. If your players have been here before, adjust the following text as needed.

When the characters approach the Crossroads, read:

The muddy path leads to a road junction where you see a wooden fort and a couple of buildings. A large, metal construction stands to one side, and from it hang iron cages. Ravens clot the cages, gorging themselves on the contents.

The Proud Boys gang camps near the trading post. They are cruel brigands who sometimes work with Magrak when he needs more muscle than his own team can provide. The bandits accompanied Magrak on his last expedition but split off from him to spend their pay at the trading post.

The characters can beat the information they need from the brigands and, in fact, this might be the best approach. In that case, go to **Tactical Encounter 1: Local Color**.

OTHER METHODS

The players might concoct some other way to track down Magrak rather than confronting the Proud Boys at the Crossroads. Using a ritual, scouring the lands around the Chaos Scar, or implementing some other method are all fine. You can still run "Local Color" as written; just change the environment. The Proud Boys might ambush the characters on the way to the Stone Forest or on the way back to Restwell Keep.

Alternatively, cautious adventurers might try talking (or, they might beat the needed information from a captive after defeating the bandits). In that case, run the "Interrogating the Brigands" skill challenge. If parley occurs first, the bandit captain, a wily half-elf named Carrus, does the talking. Carrus is unpleasant, has a foul mouth, and a leering eye. Otherwise, the same information can come from any of the bandits. Characters gain a +2 bonus to Intimidate checks if they defeat the bandits first.

Interrogating the Brigands Skill Challenge

Level: 5 (200 XP)

Complexity: 1 (4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Bluff, History, Insight, Intimidate, special

Bluff (DC 17; 1 minute; 1 success, maximum 2 successes): A character uses deception to winkle out the truth. The first success reveals the bandits are called the Proud Boys and that they "ain't afraid o' no 'venturers." A second success gets them to admit they

know Magrak Ironjaw, "jes saw 'im the day a'fore." A successful check by 5 or more results in an extra success. A failed check nets a failure and closes off Bluff.

History (DC 17; 1 minute; 1 success, maximum 1 success): A character recalls some exploit attributed to the Proud Boys. A successful check reveals the Boys are a gang who sometimes join forces with more powerful groups. Success by 5 or more lets the character remember the Boys once double-crossed an ogre named Blath and it's said he still has an axe to grind against them. This information grants the character a +2 bonus to Bluff and Intimidate checks for the duration of the challenge.

Insight (DC 12; 1 minute; 1 success, maximum 1 success): The character reads the bandits. A successful check reveals they are intimidated by numbers and might respond to violence.

Intimidate (DC 12; 1 minute; 1 success, maximum 2 successes): The character uses threats to start them talking with the same results as described under Bluff.

Special: A character that kills a Proud Boy bandit gets their attention and earns the heroes 1 success. Killing a second bandit earns 1 failure and ends the skill challenge in failure if it happens before the combat.

Success: The captain (or prisoner) reveals that they had hooked up with Magrak and helped raid a settlement beyond the wall. Magrak paid them and left them here. They think Magrak is headed to the Slaver's Stone, "just beyond the Stone Forest." They can provide directions. After the heroes depart, the bandits track them and attack the first time the heroes camp for an extended rest.

Failure: If the failure comes before combat, the bandits attack. If it comes after, the adventurers learn the same information as above, but the bandits follow them and attack while the heroes are engaged against the harpies in Tactical Encounter 2: Dung and Feathers.

2. STONE FOREST

The Stone Forest is not an actual forest but rather a collection of monoliths set here by people unknown for purposes unknown. Some claim they are teeth liberated from a primordial's mouth by a deft swing of Moradin's hammer. Curious origins aside, the Stone Forest is a popular roosting place for a band of harpies, who make it their business to torment folk coming and going from the Scar. Most locals tolerate their presence and bullying demands. Magrak is just such a local, and he offered one of his captives to silence the shrieking flock.

The Stone Forest stands between the Slaver's Stone and the Crossroads. The group can circumvent it easily, but trekking off the trail invites contact with other things haunting these parts (see "On the Way," above, for possibilities). In any event, the heroes are bound to hear the shrieking cries and the shouted curses from their captive.

Adventurers passing through learn the harpies' demand. Groups can pass freely if they offer up one of their members (a minion will do), a pile of gold (at least 5 gp per traveler), or some other valuable trinket. The harpies readily betray Magrak, telling the adventurers, if they ask, that he came this way. The harpies attack anyone who refuses to pay for their passage. Under no circumstances will they release their prisoner voluntarily.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 2: Dung and Feathers**.

BETRAYAL

If the adventurers haven't yet uncovered Zestren's sinister motives by the time the combat starts, Zestren uses the chaos in the battle to snatch Lysa and make off with her. Zestren attacks the woman, knocking her unconscious. He then races off to the north to hand her over to the ghouls.

If the characters stop Zestren and take him alive, they can get his story. Use the "Something about Zestren" skill challenge, substituting Intimidate for Diplomacy and fear for friendship. On the other hand, if Zestren escapes with Lysa, the characters must decide whether to give chase or to confront Magrak. Cluff, assuming he's still alive, argues they should press on (one life is not worth the dozen he hopes to save). He does not, however, stop the characters from going to rescue Lysa, saying he hopes to "see them once they settle that business."

MAJOR QUEST: HELP ZESTREN

Zestren is desperate to learn what befell Riddle and how to bring her back. He begs the characters to help him restore Riddle or at least learn what happened to her.

XP Reward: 350 per character.

Pursuing Zestren

The adventurers might chase Zestren straightaway, in which case they have a chance to stop him before he reaches the Cloven Skull, or they might wait until the Magrak matter is concluded, thus consigning poor Lysa to certain death. The following skill challenge applies in either situation.

Level: 5 (200 XP)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Athletics, Endurance, Perception

Athletics (DC 12, group check; variable time; 1 success, maximum 1 success): An Athletics group check must be attempted, and it can be attempted only once. The characters run to catch up with the eladrin if chasing him or must overcome some natural obstacle while tracking him. This is a group skill check with a success earned if half or more of the party succeeds on their individual checks. Failure for the group earns both 1 failure and 1 success.

Endurance (DC 17, group check; variable time; 1 success, maximum 1 success): An Endurance group check must be attempted, and it can be attempted only once. The terrain is challenging, and the characters must struggle against its manifold hardships. This is a group skill check with a success earned if half or more of the party succeeds on their individual checks. Failure for the group earns both 1 failure and 1 success.

Perception (DC 12, or 17 if tracking; variable time; 1 success, 2 successes maximum): A character tries to keep Zestren in sight or follow his tracks. Up to four characters can aid on this check.

Success: If chasing, the characters catch up with Zestren, who surrenders and reveals the whole story. He begs the characters to help him pass by the guardians so he can speak with the oracle.

Failure: The characters find the Cloven Skull but get there too late to save Lysa. Proceed with "Seer in the Water," below.

Zestren	**Level 4 Soldier**
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin	XP 175
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26	**Initiative** +5
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18	**Perception** +1
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Longsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Zestren's next turn.	
⸸ **Greenflame Blade** (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 6 fire damage. Each enemy adjacent to the target takes 3 fire damage.	
✧ **Corrosive Ruin** (acid, implement) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in blast); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d8 + 6 acid damage.	
Move Actions	
Fey Step (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**	
Zestren teleports 5 squares.	
Triggered Actions	
Blinking Blade (fire, teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An adjacent enemy Zestren has marked shifts or makes an attack that does not include him as a target.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The triggering enemy takes 5 fire damage, and then Zestren teleports 3 squares.	
Skills Arcana +11, Athletics +10, History +11	
Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 8 (+1)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 18 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+3)	
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven	
Equipment traveler's clothes, chainmail, longsword	

Lysa, the Prisoner

Assuming Lysa survives, she proves helpful. She is a strong-willed woman with brown hair and blue eyes, and she wears a torn shirt and skirt. She has a fiery disposition and a no-nonsense way about her. She knows the following:

- ✦ Magrak is headed to the Slaver's Stone, where he's to meet an orc chieftain named Po to whom he hopes to offload his captives.
- ✦ The numbers and composition of Magrak's forces.
- ✦ That the Proud Boys were involved in the attack on Cled.

Lysa is not about to go home. She joins Cluff's forces, picking up spare armor and weapons from her cohorts.

3. Slaver's Stone

The Slaver's Stone takes its name for the business conducted on the high, flat stone. Magrak named it himself. Magrak arrives at the Stone early and must wait several hours for the orc chieftain, Po, to arrive. If the characters arrive in time, which they do if they've been smart with their extended rests (see "The Consequences of Time" on page 5), they can catch the wereboar without the orcs to give him trouble. In this situation, allow the characters to see the camp and where the creatures are positioned. The characters can use Stealth against the sentries' passive Perception to move into position and, most likely, take the entire camp by surprise.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 3: Chain Gang**.

4. THE LAKE ORACLE

Although tangential to the main plot, the characters might have cause to visit the seer of the Cloven Skull depending on how the story with Zestren plays out. The Lake Oracle is an insane steel dragon, driven mad through exposure to Far Realm bleed-through long ago. The dragon fled to the Chaos Scar to escape the voices and visions she experienced and now lairs in a dark cavern. She subsists on the blindfish swimming in the underground lake where she makes her home and has little to no contact with the other creatures found in her lair.

Zestren knows the location of the Cloven Skull and can lead the characters there. Otherwise, the adventurers might come across the site through happenstance, to seek out answers to their own queries, or to deal with the evil believed to linger here. Although the oracle might be dealt with without combat, the self-styled guardians are dangerous.

The Cloven Skull

The Cloven Skull is a queer rock formation in the side of the mountains forming the Chaos Scar and, as one might expect, it appears to be an enormous human skull chiseled from the stone and with a dark gap in the center.

Go to **Tactical Encounter 4: Guardians of the Skull**.

Seer in the Water

Beyond the ghouls at the Cloven Skull, the characters find a cramped, winding passage burrowing deep into the mountain. The adventure assumes the tunnel leads more or less straight to the oracle, but feel free to add an extra encounter or two if you like. When the adventurers reach the end, they are on the pebbled shore overlooking a broad, wide lake teeming with pale crustaceans and darting blindfish. Some distance away is the small, rocky island where the oracle makes her home.

If combat breaks out, go to **Tactical Encounter 5: Eyes in the Dark**.

Heroes approaching the Lake Oracle with more discretion, however, can instead try to persuade the dragon to reveal a secret, foretell an event, or provide some other bit of information the characters need to learn. If the characters take this approach, run the "Consulting the Oracle" skill challenge.

Consulting the Oracle Skill Challenge

Level: 8 (XP 350)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Arcana, Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Insight, special

Arcana (DC 19; 5 minutes; 1 success, maximum 1 success): The character identifies the Far Realm influences in the dragon. A successful check, in addition to counting as a success, grants a +2 bonus to Bluff checks related to the challenge.

Bluff (DC 21; 1 minute; 1 success, maximum 4 successes): The character lies about the reason for wanting the knowledge. For every 5 points by which the check succeeds, the character earns an extra success. Each failed check, in addition to counting as a failure, increases the DC for all skill checks related to the challenge by 2.

Diplomacy (DC 14; 5 minutes; 1 success, maximum 4 successes): The character makes an impassioned plea to the dragon, explaining the information's importance. For every 5 points by which the check succeeds, the character earns an extra success. This skill can be used to gain 4 successes in this challenge.

History (DC 19; 5 minutes; 1 success, maximum 1 success): The character recalls some interesting historical tidbit of interest to the dragon. In addition to counting as a success, a successful check also removes 1 failure.

Insight (DC 8; 5 minutes; 1 success, maximum 1 success): The character tries to ascertain the dragon's desires. A success reveals the dragon is quite mad. A successful check, in addition to counting as a success, grants a +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks related to the challenge. Success by 5 or more also reveals the dragon might accept a gift.

Special: Offering the dragon a gift worth at least 400 gp grants 2 successes, with 1 additional success for each additional 100 gp of its worth.

Secondary Skills: Intimidate

Intimidate: The dragon does not respond to threats or bullying. Each attempted Intimidate check makes the dragon angrier and results in an automatic failure.

Success: The dragon reveals useful information pertaining to the questions the characters put forward. The quality of this information approximates to what a character might know with a successful DC 30 knowledge or monster knowledge check. This is an excellent place to see future quests, foreshadow upcoming adventures, or reveal a secret about the campaign. If Zestren is with the party and he is allowed to ask after Riddle, the dragon reveals Riddle is dead and that her soul is being held by a necromancer named Kyrznan in the dark city of Gloomwrought (*Manual of the Planes* page 57). Riddle cannot be restored to life until the soul is first recovered.

If the characters succeed on the skill challenge without accumulating any failures, the dragon rewards the character with the highest Charisma score a boon.

Whispers from Beyond **Level 9**

You hear strange whispers and experience unsettling visions, yet from the confusing jumble can pick out useful insights.

Legendary Boon 4,200 gp

Property: You gain a +1 item bonus to initiative and Perception checks.

Power (Daily): Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* An enemy enters a square adjacent to you. *Attack:* Melee 1 (triggering enemy); level + 3 vs. Will. *Hit:* The target grants combat advantage and takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls that include you as a target until the end of your next turn.

Failure: The dragon grows angry and attacks the heroes.

CONCLUSION

The adventure ends when the characters rescue the prisoners from Magrak or, if the adventurers follow up on the oracle, after getting the information they or Zestren need (or slaying the dragon). If Cluff survives, he thanks the heroes for their help and assures them they will be treated like kings the next time they come through Cled. If the characters helped Zestren learn Riddle's fate (see Tactical Encounter 5: Eyes in the Dark for more information on her fate), the eladrin is grieved by the knowledge but is more resolved than ever to hunt down the necromancer and free Riddle's soul. Whether the characters accompany Zestren and what such a mission might entail is up to you.

You also have the matter of the orc chieftain. Po is angry about not getting his slaves and a little snooping around should garner him the names of the characters. He might seek revenge by attacking the adventurers later or mount an attack on Restwell Keep. If, though, the adventurers failed to rescue the prisoners, they might try to locate them and wrest them from the orc. What did he want the slaves for? Where are they? Do they still live?

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast is in *Player's Handbook 3*, *Martial Power 2*, and *Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons*. In addition, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Robert lives, works, and will probably die in Tennessee.

1. LOCAL COLOR

Encounter Level 5 (1,025 XP)

SETUP

1 half-elf bandit captain (C)
1 half-orc hunter (H)
1 human renegade mage (M)
8 Proud Boy bandits (P)

The bandits aided Magrak Ironjaw and now camp here, finding creative ways to spend their coin. They owe Magrak no particular loyalty and are open to discussion since they are not particularly interested in dying.

The captain, hunter, mage, and four bandits are at the site. The other four bandits are off doing something bad in the trees. They come to investigate sounds of fighting at the start of the third round entering from the right side of the map.

As noted above, if the characters arrive before the orcs, allow the characters to see the camp and where the creatures are positioned. The characters can use Stealth against the sentries' passive Perception to move into position and possibly take the entire camp by surprise.

When the heroes can see the encampment, read:

In the shadow cast by the wooden fort, you spy an encampment with a fire burning in the center. A little more than a half-dozen humanoids loiter, drink, and carouse. Each one wears a soiled bandage around his or her left arm—probably a badge of some kind.

If the heroes approach in the open, read:

A slim half-elf looks up from the mob and pins you with a suspicious glare. "Looks like you chose a bad day to stop by, right fellas?" Much laughter ensues.

Half-Elf Bandit Captain (C) — **Level 6 Skirmisher (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 250

HP 69; **Bloodied** 34 — **Initiative** +9
AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18 — **Perception** +8
Speed 6 — Low-light vision

STANDARD ACTIONS

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the captain shifts 1 square.

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5/10; +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d4 + 4 damage.

Slash and Dash (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Effect: The captain makes a *longsword* attack, shifts 2 squares, and then makes a *dagger* attack.

Triggering Slash (weapon) ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and one ally shifts 1 square and makes a melee basic attack as a free action.

Skills Athletics +11, Diplomacy +11, Insight +8, Stealth +12

Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 11 (+3)
Con 13 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+3)	**Cha** 16 (+6)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment leather armor, longsword, 6 daggers

TACTICS

The bandits fight simply, working in teams to flank while the mage hurls *magic missiles* and other spells into the party's midst.

Half-Orc Hunter (H) — **Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 200

HP 62; **Bloodied** 31 — **Initiative** +7
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16 — **Perception** +3
Speed 6 (8 while charging) — Low-light vision

TRAITS

Draw First Blood
The hunter's melee attacks deal 1d10 extra damage against any target that has not yet taken damage during the encounter.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Battleaxe (weapon) ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.

Longbow (weapon) ✦ At-Will
Attack: Ranged 20/40 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.

Evasive Chop (weapon) ✦ At-Will
Effect: Before and after the attack, the hunter shifts 1 square.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Furious Assault ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The hunter deals damage with an attack.
Effect (Free Action): The triggering attack deals 1d10 extra damage.

Skills Endurance +9, Nature +8

Str 16 (+5)	**Dex** 17 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment leather armor, battleaxe, longbow, 20 arrows

BOTCHING THE ENCOUNTER

If the characters wipe out the bandits and learn nothing from them, all is not lost. Millen Silvereye, the psychic tiefling who runs the Trading Post, is relieved to be rid of the bandits and tells the characters everything they need to know in exchange for 50 gp. Substitute someone else if Millen is dead or gone.

Human Renegade Mage (M)	**Level 4 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26	**Initiative** +4
AC 17, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15	**Perception** +5
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ Quarterstaff (weapon) ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 damage.	
⊛ Magic Missile (force, implement) ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature)	
Effect: The target takes 5 force damage.	
⊁ Brilliant Chains (implement, lightning) ✦ Encounter	
Primary Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 lightning damage, and the mage makes a secondary attack.	
Secondary Attack: Ranged 10 (two creatures within 5 squares of the primary target); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 4 lightning damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). Whenever the target ends its turn more than 5 squares away from the primary target while it is slowed, it takes 5 lightning damage and the mage knocks the target prone.	
✲ **Cacophonous Burst** (implement, thunder) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 squares (creatures in burst); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 thunder damage, the mage pushes the target 1 square, and the target becomes dazed (save ends).	
Triggered Actions	
Deflecting Shield ✦ Encounter	
Trigger: The mage is the target of a melee or ranged attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The mage gains a +4 bonus to the defense targeted by the triggering attack until the end of the mage's next turn.	
Skills Arcana +11	
Str 10 (+2)	**Dex** 14 (+4)	**Wis** 17 (+5)
Con 12 (+3)	**Int** 18 (+6)	**Cha** 12 (+3)
Alignment Evil	Languages Common	
Equipment robes, quarterstaff, orb		

8 Proud Boy Bandits (P)	**Level 5 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 50 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17	**Perception** +1
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 5 damage.	
⊁ **Crossbow** (weapon) ✦ **Recharges when bandit spends minor action to reload**	
Attack: Ranged 15/30 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
✧ **Fearful Scattering** (fear) ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The bandit drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (No Action): Close burst 3 (ally minions in burst); the target shifts 1 square as a free action.	
Str 17 (+5)	**Dex** 15 (+4)	**Wis** 9 (+1)
Con 13 (+3)	**Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 12 (+3)
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common	

Features of the Area

Treasure: The captain has a level 6 magic item. The bandits have 2 *potions of healing* and a sack of 350 gp (payment from Magrak).

2. DUNG AND FEATHERS

Encounter Level 6 (1,400 XP)

SETUP

7 cackling harpies (H)

The harpies perch atop the monoliths.

When the heroes come upon the Stone Teeth, read:

Eight monoliths, each twenty feet tall, rise around the trail leading to the Scar. No stone stands straight; they lean as if they might fall at any moment. Lichen and dung stain the rocks, likely from the screeching bird women perched atop them. One calls out, "A gift and we shall let your band pass unharmed!" Just then, you hear a pitiful cry sounding from atop the eighth stone, where you see a terrified young woman searching for a way down.

TACTICS

The harpies start the fight with *fling filth* attacks at the nearest enemies and then swoop down from their perches to make *swooping slash* attacks and then land on another monolith. They fight until only two remain, at which point they kill their prisoner and fly off toward the valley.

Unstable Monolith — **Single-Use Terrain**

The spotted stone does not sit easily in the earth and might fall with a bit of pressure.

Requirement: You must be adjacent to the monolith.
Check: DC 21 Athletics check to topple the monolith
Success: The monolith falls and makes the following attack.
Target: Each creature in a close blast 3 away from the character making the check
Attack: +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, the monolith knocks the target prone, and the target has superior cover and cannot stand. The target can use the escape action (DC 15) to end the "cannot stand" condition.
Miss: Half damage, and the target slides to the nearest unoccupied square adjacent to the blast.

Filth Fever — **Level 5 Disease**

Endurance improve DC 17, maintain DC 12, worsen DC 11 or lower

The target is cured. | **Initial Effect:** The target loses a healing surge. | The target takes a –2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex. | **Final State:** The target takes a –2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex. The target loses all healing surges and cannot regain hit points.

7 Cackling Harpies (H) — **Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid — XP 200

HP 62; **Bloodied** 31 — **Initiative** +8
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17 — **Perception** +3
Speed 6, fly 8
Immune filth fever

STANDARD ACTIONS

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage or 2d6 + 4 damage with combat advantage.

Swooping Slash ✦ At-Will
Effect: The harpy flies its speed and makes the following attack at any one point during its movement.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the harpy slides the target 2 squares.

Fling Filth (disease) **✦ Recharge** ⚅
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is exposed to filth fever (see below).

Curdling Screech (fear, psychic) **✦ Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in blast); +8 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Hideous Cackle (fear) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: The harpy hits with a melee or ranged attack.
Attack (Free Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in burst)
Effect: The target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

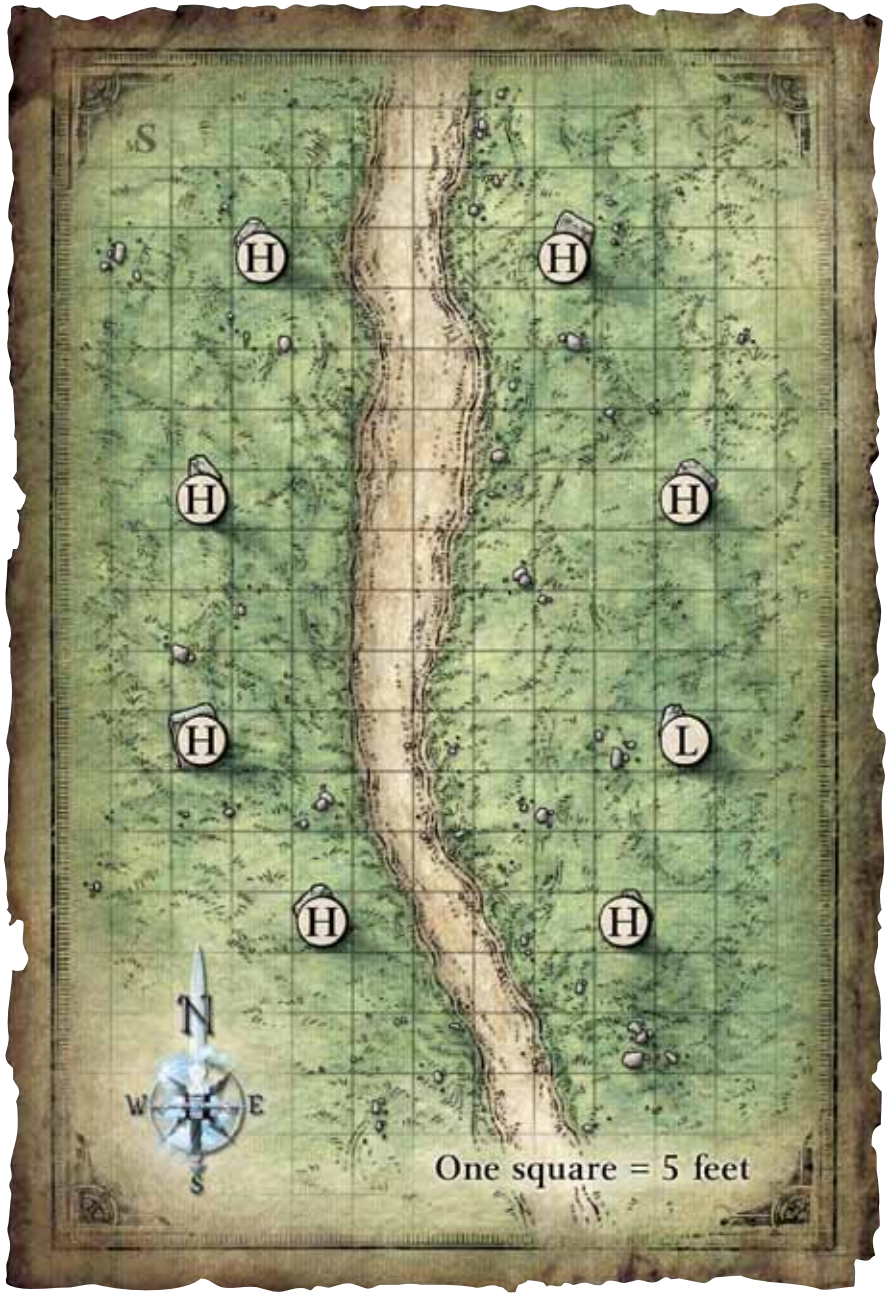
Str 11 (+2)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 14 (+4)
Alignment Evil	Languages Common	

Features of the Area

Monolith: Each monolith stands 20 feet tall and counts as blocking terrain. A monolith has AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12, and 80 hit points. These stones have plenty of handholds and can be climbed with a DC 12 Athletics check. Furthermore, a good shove might knock a stone to the ground.

Chained Prisoner (L): Use Cled warrior statistics for the prisoner, whose name is Lysa. She attacks any harpy she can reach on initiative count 10.

Treasure: The harpies keep their wealth stashed atop one of the stones. It consists of 300 gp and 400 sp.



3. CHAIN GANG

Encounter Level 7 (1,628 XP)

SETUP

Magrak Ironjaw (M)
1 spiked blademaster (S)
2 orc reavers (R)
6 hobgoblin sentries (H)
6 mercenary archers (A)

Magrak has set up camp around the Slaver's Stone. He and his bladeling cohort sit around the campfire. The orc reavers guard the dozen prisoners. The hobgoblins hold positions to watch for enemies, while a few archers hide in the rocks so they can pick off intruders from cover and the rest take positions atop the drum. Magrak expects the orc chieftain, but anyone else gets one warning to "sod off" before he orders his force to attack.

When the heroes see the encampment, read:

A twenty-foot tall stone drum with a crude stair winding all around rises in the center of an encampment, where you see several humanoids and their prisoners milling about.

Perception
DC 20: *You spot a filthy human armed with a longbow hiding in the rocks.*

Magrak Ironjaw (M) **Level 6 Elite Brute**
Large natural humanoid (shapechanger), wereboar XP 500
HP 172; **Bloodied** 86 **Initiative** +3
AC 17, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17 **Perception** +4
Speed 6 (8 in boar form)
Immune moontusk fever; **Vulnerable** silver (the wereboar loses regeneration until the end of its next turn)
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

TRAITS

Bloodied Resilience
While bloodied, Magrak gains a +2 bonus to all defenses.

Regeneration (healing)
Magrak regains 5 hit points whenever he starts his turn and has at least 1 hit point.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Maul (weapon) ✦ At-Will
Requirement: Magrak must be in humanoid form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage.

Gore ✦ At-Will
Requirement: Magrak must be in boar form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, ongoing 5 damage (save ends), and the target is exposed to moontusk fever (see below). If Magrak is bloodied, the attack deals ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Murderous Smash (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Requirement: Magrak must be in humanoid form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one bloodied creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 6 damage, and Magrak knocks the target prone.

MINOR ACTIONS

Change Shape (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**
Magrak can alter his physical form to appear as a dire boar or a unique humanoid.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Death Strike ✦ Encounter
Trigger: Magrak drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): Magrak makes a melee basic attack.

Murderous Frenzy ✦ Encounter
Trigger: Magrak reduces an enemy to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): Magrak gains 1 action point.

Savage Rebuke ✦ At-Will
Trigger: Magrak is hit by a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Magrak makes a melee basic attack.

Skills Athletics +13, Endurance +11, Intimidate +8

Str 20 (+8)	**Dex** 10 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 16 (+6)	**Int** 10 (+3)	**Cha** 11 (+3)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Equipment hide armor, maul

Moontusk Fever **Level 6 Disease**
Endurance improve DC 17, maintain DC 12, worsen DC 11 or lower

The target is cured.

◀ **Initial Effect:** The target takes a –2 penalty to saving throws while bloodied.

◀▶ While bloodied, the target can roll only one saving throw at the end of its turn, even if it is affected by multiple effects.

▶ **Final State:** When the target rolls a saving throw while bloodied, it rolls two dice and takes the lower of the two results.

Tactics

Magrak doesn't place much stock in group tactics and it shows in the forces under his command. Magrak prefers to fight in humanoid form, smashing enemies with *maul* and *murderous smash*. He uses *change shape* before he charges, so he can *gore* and expose his opponents to *moontusk fever*.

The spiked blademaster is far more guarded in her approach. She engages the nearest knot of foes, using her aura and *ensnaring spikes* to lock down enemies. The blademaster holds *razor storm* as a defensive power to nail enemies crowding around her.

The orcs abandon their prisoners on the first round by using *ferocious charge* to close the distance and then focus attacks on their targets until they can use *sudden charge*. The minions fight simply. The sentries move to clump up into teams of two to benefit from their *phalanx soldier* auras while the archers pick off any ranged enemies they can see.

6 Hobgoblin Sentries (H) — **Level 4 Minion Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 44 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +6
AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 **Perception** +3
Speed 5 Low-light vision

Traits

Phalanx Soldier
A hobgoblin sentry gains a +2 bonus to AC while at least one other hobgoblin with *phalanx soldier* is adjacent to it.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.

Triggered Actions

Hobgoblin Resilience ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The hobgoblin suffers an effect that a save can end.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The hobgoblin makes a saving throw against the triggering effect.

Str 18 (+6)	**Dex** 14 (+4)	**Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 9 (+1)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment chainmail, light shield, spear

Spiked Blademaster (S) — **Level 5 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, bladeling — XP 200

HP 62; **Bloodied** 31 **Initiative** +5
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16 **Perception** +4
Speed 5
Resist 5 acid

Traits

☼ **Blademaster's Eye** ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura becomes marked until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Greatsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage.

⸸ **Power Strike** (weapon) ✦ **2/Encounter**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, and ongoing 3 damage (save ends).

Minor Actions

⇜ **Razor Storm** ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 1 (creatures in burst); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Ensnaring Spikes** ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The blademaster's *razor storm* power must be unexpended.
Trigger: An adjacent enemy the blademaster has marked would move or shift.
Attack (Free Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 5 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of its turn.

Skills Intimidate +7

Str 19 (+6)	**Dex** 13 (+3)	**Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 9 (+1)	**Cha** 10 (+2)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Equipment chainmail, greatsword

2 Orc Reavers (R) — **Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 200 each

HP 65; **Bloodied** 32 **Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15 **Perception** +3
Speed 6 (8 when charging) Low-light vision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Battleaxe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage or 1d10 + 6 damage against a prone target.

⸸ **Ferocious Charge** (weapon) ✦ **Recharges when bloodied**
Effect: The orc charges and makes the following attack in place of a melee basic attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, and the orc knocks the target prone.

⸸ **Warrior's Surge** (healing, weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage, and the orc regains 16 hit points.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Sudden Charge** (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The orc reduces an enemy to 0 hit points.
Effect (Free Action): The orc charges the nearest the enemy.

Str 19 (+6)	**Dex** 13 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 17 (+5)	**Int** 6 (+0)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment hide armor, heavy shield, battleaxe

6 Mercenary Archers (A)	Level 4 Minion Artillery
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 44
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +5
AC 16, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +8
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
➶ **Longbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 20/40 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 5 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Scatter ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An ally the archer can see drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Free Action): The archer shifts 1 square.	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 10 (+2) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 9 (+1)	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment leather armor, short sword, longbow, 20 arrows	

Features of the Area

Rocks: The large rocks jutting from the ground count as difficult terrain and grant cover to creatures fully in their spaces. Prone creatures fully in these spaces gain superior cover.

Slaver's Stone: A wide and 20-foot-tall stone platform occupies the camp's center. The stairs winding around the platform are difficult terrain. A fall from the top deals 2d10 damage.

Prisoners: The twelve prisoners are in chains and immobilized. Freeing a prisoner requires a DC 17 Thievery or DC 19 Strength check. The chain can also be attacked: AC/Reflex 8, Fortitude 8, 60 hp. The prisoners use Cled warrior statistics except their melee basic attacks deal half damage until they are armed.

Treasure: Magrak has a sack filled with coins that includes 298 gp, 396 sp, and 240 cp.

4. GUARDIANS OF THE SKULL

Encounter Level 5 (1,100 XP)

SETUP

2 ghouls (G)
4 centipede scuttlers (S)

Two ghouls along with their pet centipedes established themselves here to exact payment from any who would treat with the oracle, a fee of which the oracle is unaware and never receives. The undead prefer living gifts for passage, and anyone who offers a sacrifice can move through the gap unmolested. Otherwise, they block anyone from entering, happily attacking those who try.

When the heroes reach the Cloven Skull, read:

A massive stone skull with a split down the middle juts from the side of a rocky wall. Humanoid skulls with bits of flesh still clinging to the bone stand in piles and hang in bundles from ropes on either side of the fissure.

If the heroes approach, read:

Two filthy humanoids dressed in befouled rags emerge from the gap, mouths spread wide in horrid smiles of jagged teeth and long black tongue. They spread their thin arms in welcome, showing stained hands ending in sharp talons. One says, "See the oracle? Pay price. One life and you may pass."

TACTICS

The ghouls hold positions in front of the gap, using *claw* attacks or *ghoulish bite* attacks against immobilized and stunned opponents. The centipedes boil out from the darkness at the start of the second round, climbing up the walls and circling behind the heroes to *bite* and *feed*.

2 Ghouls (G) — **Level 5 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) — XP 200 each

HP 63; **Bloodied** 31 — **Initiative** +8
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 17 — **Perception** +2
Speed 8, climb 4 — Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

STANDARD ACTIONS

⊕ Claws ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

⸸ Ghoulish Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one immobilized, stunned, or unconscious creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 4 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).

Skills Stealth +11

Str 14 (+4)	**Dex** 19 (+6)	**Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 12 (+3)

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common

4 Centipede Scuttlers (S) — **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast — XP 175 each

HP 51; **Bloodied** 25 — **Initiative** +8
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 14 — **Perception** +2
Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb) — Darkvision

STANDARD ACTIONS

⊕ Bite (poison) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). A target already taking ongoing poison damage is also weakened (save ends).

⸸ Feed ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one weakened creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 2 damage.

MOVE ACTIONS

Scuttle ✦ At-Will
The centipede shifts 4 squares. When it shifts into an ally's space, that movement does not count toward the 4 squares the centipede can shift.

Skills Stealth +11

Str 14 (+4)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 11 (+2)	**Int** 2 (-2)	**Cha** 9 (+1)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Features of the Area

Cloven Skull: The gap in the skull leads into a dark and winding passage that eventually ends at a subterranean lake.

Skull Stacks: Humanoid skulls stand in neat stacks to either side of the gap. The stacks count as blocking terrain. All squares within 3 squares of each stack count as necrotic ground. Creatures that spend healing surges on necrotic ground regain only half the normal number of hit points.

Treasure: Scattered across the ground before the fissure are 80 gp and one *potion of lifeshield* (level 5, *Adventurer's Vault*, page 188).

5. EYES IN THE DARK

Encounter Level 8 (1,850 XP)

SETUP

Lake Oracle (O)
12 murk wretches (W)

The Lake Oracle lurks on the island in the lake's center. The murk wretches, horrid petitioners driven mad by the Oracle's revelations, haunt the water and emerge to join the fight should the dragon come under attack.

When the heroes enter this cavern, read:

The tunnel ends at a stony shore against which oily black water laps. A rocky island rises from the waters some distance away, where you can just make out a humanoid figure crouching by the lake.

The heroes can catch the Lake Oracle's attention by calling to her. She climbs on a small boat and rows to the opposite shore.

When the Oracle reaches the heroes, read:

A pale human woman with white, unseeing eyes regards you through dirty gray strands of hair. She wears nothing, but is unashamed by her nakedness. She says, "You have come seeking knowledge. Tell me why I should cast aside mystery's veil."

Lake Oracle (O) **Level 6 Solo Controller**
Large natural magical beast (blind, dragon, shapechanger), steel dragon XP 1,250

HP 288; **Bloodied** 144 **Initiative** +4
AC 20, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 20 **Perception** +11
Speed 8, fly 10 (hover) Blind, blindsight 10
Immune blinded, gaze; **Resist** 15 force
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

TRAITS

Aura of Madness ✦ Aura 3
Whenever a creature starts its turn within the aura, the Lake Oracle can slide the target 1 square as an opportunity action.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Bite (force) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage plus 1d8 force damage, and the Lake Oracle slides the target 1 square.

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.

Double Attack ✦ At-Will
Effect: The Lake Oracle makes two *claw* attacks.

Breath Weapon (force) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in blast); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 4 force damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

Frightful Presence (fear) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +10 vs. Will
Hit: The target is stunned until the end of the Lake Oracle's next turn.
Aftereffect: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

MINOR ACTIONS

Portent ✦ At-Will, 1/round
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Will
Hit: Until the end of the Lake Oracle's next turn, the target takes a -2 penalty to any attack that includes the dragon as a target and the target grants combat advantage.

Change Shape (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**
The lake oracle can alter its physical form to appear as a unique human.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Wing Scatter ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy moves into an adjacent square.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the Lake Oracle knocks the target prone.
Effect: The Lake Oracle shifts 1 square and flies 3 squares.

Bloodied Breath ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The Lake Oracle is first bloodied in the encounter.
Effect (Free Action): Breath weapon recharges, and the Lake Oracle uses it.

Skills Arcana +9, Bluff +12, Insight +11

Str 17 (+6)	**Dex** 13 (+4)	**Wis** 17 (+6)
Con 16 (+6)	**Int** 12 (+4)	**Cha** 19 (+7)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic

TACTICS

The dragon drops her disguise, uses *frightful presence*, and then spends an action point to use her *breath weapon*. The dragon then moves away, flying near the ceiling or near the island until *breath weapon* recharges. She uses melee attacks against any creature that closes on her.

Her servants emerge from the waters to drag people on the shore into the water.

12 Murk Wretches (W)	Level 5 Minion Brute
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic, blind)	XP 50 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +4
AC 17, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16	**Perception** +3
Speed 6, swim 3	Blind, blindsight 10
Immune blinded, gaze	
Traits	
Aquatic	
The wretch can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Standard Actions	
ⓘ **Claws ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 5 damage, the wretch shifts 1 square, and the wretch pulls the target 1 square to a square adjacent to it.	
Skills Stealth +9	
Str 17 (+5) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 6 (+0) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven	

Features of the Area

Illumination: This room is dark.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet overhead.

Water: Water squares adjacent to the shore count as difficult terrain. Beyond these squares, a character must swim (DC 10 Athletics check).

Skiff: The boat can hold two Medium or Small creatures. Characters standing on the boat that make an attack must immediately succeed on a DC 12 Acrobatics check or fall prone in the boat. Failure by 5 or more topples the character into the water.

Treasure: If the dragon does not grant the heroes a boon, they can find a level 9 magic item on the rocks where the dragon lairs.

PRINT THIS PAGE FOR PLAYERS RUNNING CLUFF, ZESTREN, OR THE CLED WARRIORS.

Cluff Maclire **Level 4 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP –

HP 52; **Bloodied** 26; **Surges** 8 **Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 18 **Perception** +7
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Bastard Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **2/Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage.

Wolf Pack Tactics (martial, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Before the attack, one ally adjacent to you or the target can shift 1 square as a free action.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.

Hold the Line (martial, weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, allies adjacent to you gain a +2 power bonus to AC and cannot be pushed, pulled, or slid.

Move Actions

Knight's Move ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Ranged 10 (one ally); the target takes a move action as a free action.

Minor Actions

Leader (healing) ✦ **2/Encounter**
Effect: Close burst 5 (one ally); the target can spend a healing surge.

Skills Intimidate +10
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 16 (+5)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Equipment leather armor, bastard sword, 2 javelins

Cled Warrior **Level 4 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP –

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +4
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16 **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage (6 damage when charging).

Move Actions

Deft Advance ✦ **At-Will**
The warrior shifts 2 squares.

Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 11 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 9 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment hide armor, spear

Zestren **Level 4 Soldier**
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin XP 175

HP 52; **Bloodied** 26 **Initiative** +5
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18 **Perception** +1
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Zestren's next turn.

Greenflame Blade (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 6 fire damage. Each enemy adjacent to the target takes 3 fire damage.

Corrosive Ruin (acid, implement) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in blast); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 6 acid damage.

Move Actions

Fey Step (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Zestren teleports 5 squares.

Triggered Actions

Blinking Blade (fire, teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An adjacent enemy Zestren has marked shifts or makes an attack that does not include him as a target.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The triggering enemy takes 5 fire damage, and then Zestren teleports 3 squares.

Skills Arcana +11, Athletics +10, History +11
Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 8 (+1)
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 18 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+3)
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment traveler's clothes, chainmail, longsword

Campaign Workbook: Sea Demon's Shrine

By Richard L. Baker

illustration by Chris Burdett ✦ cartography by Sean MacDonald

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In the depths of a great cave filled with sea-ooze and the briny smell of the deep lies a shrine dedicated to the demon prince Demogorgon. The heroes must race to escape the rapidly flooding chamber before they are trapped in the water-filled room. The rising water, however, is both friend and foe.

Encounters in this locale slowly move upward as the water rises. The path to the higher ledge appears and disappears as one by one floating rafts "fill in" the missing stairs and are then submerged again. It's also a great location for an encounter with a mix of aquatic and landbound monsters.

The default level for the hazards and obstacles in the room is 5. If you use this encounter locale for a higher-level encounter, consult the Difficulty Class and Damage by Level table on page 42 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Read the following aloud when characters enter the shrine:

This huge, dank cavern is dotted with patches of slick sea ooze. Several stone idols in the shape of demonic fanged octopi stand on stone pedestals and glow with a faint green phosphorescence. Large pools of dark water lap softly in the floor. The room climbs steeply to the east, ending in a high ledge 75 feet above the floor at the far end of the room. A precarious stone stair winds up toward the high ledge, but it is broken by large gaps. A number of crude wooden rafts lie chained to the floor below the gaps in the stair.

Flooding Room

The most important feature of the shrine is the fact that it floods. Water fills the chamber at a constant rate that drives the action upward throughout an encounter. Several different mechanisms might begin the flooding (choose one or more for the encounter):

- **Tidal Bore:** The shrine's pools lead to sea caves on a nearby coast, where shallow, narrowing passages force the incoming tide into the room periodically as a natural phenomenon. The flooding begins automatically 1d10 rounds after the characters enter the room.
- **Idol Curse:** When a creature sets off the Cursed Idol trap (see below), the trap also triggers the flooding of the chamber.
- **Manually Activated:** A monster in the room pushes down the trigger pedestal on the high, eastern ledge of the room. The mechanism opens floodgates in passages below that begin the flooding.

When the flooding begins, the doors at the west and east ends of the chamber are forced to close by water-powered mechanisms, thus locking everyone inside.

The water level in the room rises 5 feet at the end of every round. At the end of the first round of flooding, the floor of the western part of the chamber is covered by 5 feet of water, but no other part of the chamber is submerged. At the end of the second round, water in the western part of the room is 10 feet deep and is lapping up the stairs that lead to the nearest idol, but the rest of the room is dry. At the end of the third round, the flooding water covers the large central floor section of the room to a depth of 5 feet, at which point the western part of the room is beneath 15 feet of water. Pay attention to the elevation figures given on the map!

As the room floods, the floats rise naturally to stay atop the water. After the first round of flooding, the three floats along the south wall are bobbing at the surface with 5 feet of water under them. The stone steps to the west are 20 feet high and the ones to the east are 40 feet high—the floats won't rise up and "complete" the stairs until rounds 5, 6, and 7 respectively.

The floats are tethered by chains to the floor of the room, so they don't continue rising once the water rises over the elevations given for each floor; they're submerged by the rising water. However, the floats are fitted with a mechanism that detaches them from the anchoring chain once the water is 10 feet over the float, which sends each float rocketing to the surface in an immense spray of water. (See the Detached Float hazard.)

The room floods for 20 rounds, at which point water fills the room completely to its 100-foot ceiling. It remains flooded for 20 rounds, then the water begins to recede at the rate of 5 feet per round.

You can assume that swimming characters on the surface float on top of the water and are carried upward as the water rises.

Cursed Idol Trap

The idols are potent magical traps. They attack any creature who is not a worshiper of Demogorgon or consecrated to Demogorgon's service. Because they restrain their victims, they can easily hold a character in place as the water rises over his or her head.

Cursed Idol **Level 5 Obstacle**
Trap XP 350

A tendril of dark mist snakes out from the octopus idol and solidifies into a black, oily tentacle.

Trap: This trap consists of the squares adjacent to each idol. When a creature steps into the area of this attack, a magical tentacle appears and attacks the creature.

Perception

- **DC 22:** The creature notices the dark tendrils of mist slowly seething amid the idol's stone tentacles.
- **DC 26:** The creature can see which squares are in range of the tendrils.

Additional Skill: Religion

- **DC 22:** The character's knowledge provides a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to disable the trap.

Trigger

When a creature enters or begins its turn in a trapped square, the trap attacks. Creatures which begin their turn already restrained by the trap aren't attacked again.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee** 0
Target: Creature in trapped square.
Attack: +8 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d10+4 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).

Countermeasures

- A character who makes a DC 22 Thievery check can locate the tiny vents which emit the mist and plug them with mud or some other substance.
- A character who makes a DC 26 Acrobatics check can move through a trigger square without provoking the attack. The squares count as difficult terrain.
- A character within 3 squares who makes a DC 26 Religion check as a standard action can suppress the curse until the end of his next turn.

Detached Float Hazard

The floats are anchored to the bottom by chains, and as the water rises above the length of the chain, they become submerged. A secondary float mechanism under each raft releases the chains from the raft once the water rises more than 10 feet above the float level, sending the float rocketing to the surface.

Detached Float **Level 1 Obstacle**
Hazard XP 100

The wooden raft shoots to the surface and strikes anyone in the water above it.

Hazard: Each raft detaches from its mooring chain when the water rises 10 feet above its anchor depth and rockets to the surface, endangering creatures in the square above and all adjacent squares.

Perception

- **DC 20:** The character notices the float beneath the water surface.
- **DC 25:** The character notices the small float-and-pin mechanism that will detach the float from its mooring, and determines which squares are in danger.

Trigger

The float detaches and attacks at the end of the round in which the water depth increases to 10 feet above its moored level. Each float attacks only once.

Attack

Free Action **Close** burst 1
Target: All creatures in the squares immediately above the float, and in adjacent squares.
Attack: +6 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square and dazed until the end of its next turn.

Countermeasures

- The release mechanism can be jammed with a DC 20 Thievery check and a standard action, but you must be adjacent to the float to make the skill check (and the float may be submerged under 5 or 10 feet of water).

Encounters

The best encounters for this setting include a mix of aquatic monsters to threaten characters in the water and monsters with ranged attacks who can shoot at characters trying to stay ahead of the rising water by scrambling up the stairs and floats. Place aquatic monsters in the pools on the shrine floor; as the water level reaches each pool, the monsters can swim out into the room.

Encounters suitable for the Sea Demon's Shrine include:

Level 5 encounter (XP 1,050):

- Cursed idols (level 5 trap)
- Surfacing floats (level 1 hazard)
- 2 visejaw crocodiles (level 4 soldier)
- 2 greenscale darters (level 5 lurkers)

Level 8 encounter (XP 1,400):

- Cursed idols (level 5 trap)
- Surfacing floats (level 1 hazard)
- 3 sahuagin raiders (level 6 soldiers)
- Sahuagin priest (level 8 artillery)

Level 9 encounter (XP 1,600)

- Cursed idols (level 5 trap)
- Surfacing floats (level 1 hazard)
- 2 piranha swarms (level 7 brutes)
- 2 flameskulls (level 8 artillery)

Level 17 encounter (XP 7,000)

- Cursed idols (leveled up to level 15 trap)
- 3 kuo-toa harpooners (level 14 soldiers)
- 2 kuo-toa monitors (level 16 skirmishers)

Piranha Swarm	Level 7 Brute
Medium natural beast (aquatic, swarm)	XP 300
HP 95; **Bloodied** 47	**Initiative** +7
AC 19, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18	**Perception** +9
Speed swim 8	
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks	
Vulnerable 5 against close and area attacks	
Traits	
☼ **Swarm Attack** ✦ **Aura** 1	
The piranha swarm makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that begins its turn in the aura.	
Standard Actions	
ǂ **Swarm of Teeth** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8+5 damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends)	
Str 16 (+6) **Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 15 (+5) **Int** 2 (-1)	**Cha** 10 (+3)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –	

Features of the Area

Illumination: The idols all glow with a faint greenish phosphorescence, providing dim light in a 10-square radius from each one.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 100 feet above the lowest part of the floor (the west end). Jagged iron blades stud the ceiling like stalactites.

Ledges: The elevation of each section of the room is marked in feet.

Walls: The cave walls are rough but slick (DC 20 Athletics check to climb).

Doors: The doors are large, strong doors of iron. Barnacles encrust their inner surfaces. They slam shut and seal when the room begins to flood (AC 4, Ref 4, Fort 12, 40 hp, break DC 27). Opening the door mechanism requires 6 successes at Thievery (DC 20). Working underwater to open the door is definitely an unfavorable circumstance!

Idols: These large idols are carved in the shape of demonic octopi. Each is trapped (see Cursed Idol, below). AC 4, Ref 4, Fort 12, 40 hp.

Pools: The pools are 20 feet deep and are linked by 5-foot-wide passages at the bottom to each other and the sea. When the room begins flooding, the water pours up out of these pools.

Floats: Crude wooden rafts are lashed atop large barrels. They lie on the chamber floor, where they are tethered by long, iron chains. Floats lying on the ground are difficult terrain and provide cover.

Some floats feature rickety steps so that they "fill in" the stairs when the room floods to the right level. A floating raft is an unstable surface (see Acrobatics skill), DC 15. If a character fails this check by 4 or less, he loses his move action and fails to enter the square. If he fails by 5 or more, he falls into an adjacent square.

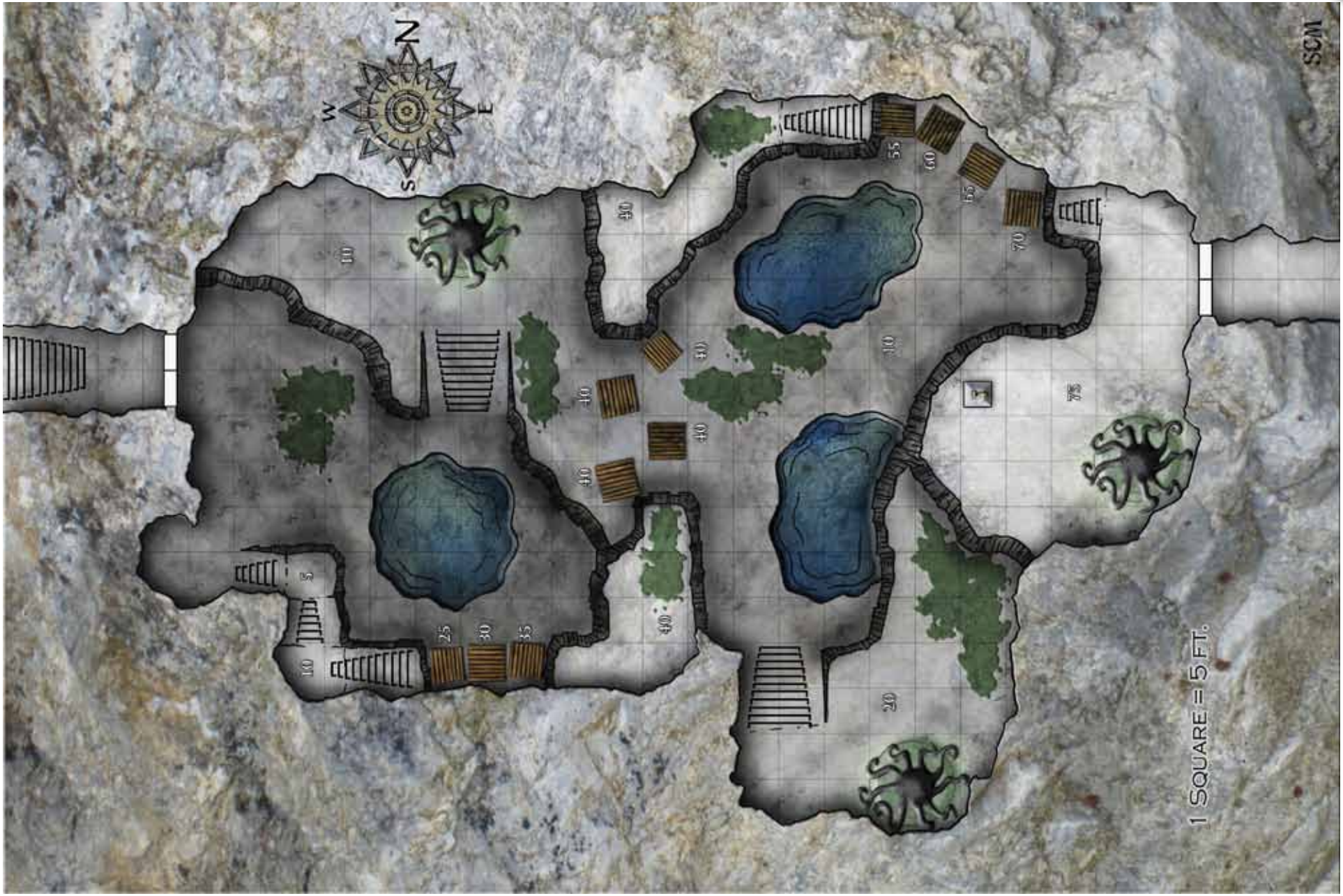
Pedestal: If you decide that the room's flooding is manually activated, this stone block holds the trigger mechanism. An adjacent creature can start the flood cycle by using the trigger (a minor action). The trigger mechanism can be jammed with a DC 26 Thievery check as a standard action.

Sea Ooze: This is difficult terrain.

Flooding Water: As the cavern floods (see below), it slowly fills with rough, turbulent water. Swimming in this water requires an Athletics check at DC 15. If you fail by 4 or less, you stay where you are and lose the rest of your move action. If you fail by 5 or more, you sink 1 square and risk drowning (page 159 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

About the Author

Richard Baker is an award-winning game designer who has written numerous D&D adventures and sourcebooks, including the *Manual of the Planes*, *Draconomicon 2*, and the *Dark Sun Campaign Guide*. He's also a New York Times bestselling author best-selling author of Forgotten Realms novels such as *Condemnation*, the Last Mythal trilogy, and the Blades of the Moonsea series.


N
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SCM
1 SQUARE = 5 FT.

DARK·SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

Mar Juk-Adan, Dune Trader

by Rodney Thompson ✦ illustration by Sarah Stone

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The lifeblood of many remote settlements, of villages far from the city-states, is the dune trader. Dune traders are responsible for the transport and sale of critical goods across the wastes of Athas, placing them among the most shrewd and independent people on the harsh desert world. Yet few dune traders are as eccentric or as dangerous as Mar Juk-Adan, a human dune trader who travels across the length and breadth of the Tyr region in a caravan all his own.

Mar Juk-Adan is a gray-haired and bearded human in his mid-forties, a ripe old age for a dune trader that has spent as much time crossing Athas's deserts as he has. According to those who have traveled with him for decades, Juk-Adan has always been the head of the caravan; there was no caravan before Juk-Adan, and no one has ever known Juk-Adan as anything but the head of his caravan. He has earned the loyalty of the men and women in his employ dozens of times over. Though not the wealthiest or most well-known dune trader, he does have a reputation for being a man that knows how to get exactly what you need—for a price.

Mar Juk-Adan's primary reputation is as a purveyor of rare goods. Juk-Adan claims to have rarities from dozens of places and times. Not only does he deal in rare spices and hand-crafted goods from all of the city-states, he also buys and sells antiquities from city-states long gone. With such an eclectic collection, it is no surprise that Juk-Adan rarely has more than one of any item on hand. Though he coyly refuses to explain where he obtained his wares to outsiders, the truth is that he has an uncanny, almost supernatural knack for finding things. On more than one occasion, Juk-Adan has sent his guards into the ruins of ancient cities and outposts to have them return laden with treasures of ages past. How he finds these ruins when they seem to hide from every other treasure hunter is a mystery, though some of his guards and employees suspect that he has an unrevealed psionic talent for finding specific objects no matter where they are hidden.

Though his trade in rare loot is lucrative, it is not Juk-Adan's ability to find lost treasure that makes him so valuable—and so dangerous. Mar Juk-Adan can get anything you need, as he is fond of telling people. All he asks in return is time and a handsome sum of money. Once a bargain has been struck, Juk-Adan has never failed to produce the desired goods. In many ways, he and his caravan are like bounty hunters of exotic wares. They take a job, they disappear into the desert for weeks or months at a time, and when they return they have in their possession that which the client sought. No barrier can stand in the way of Mar Juk-Adan, so they say; not the law, not sorcerer-kings, not even the Dragon itself. Juk-Adan has defied templars, stolen from the sorcerer-kings, spat in the eye of dangerous elf clan leaders, and braved the horrors of the Athasian desert, without ever once failing to retrieve what was paid for.

Despite his smiling exterior and eagerness to please, beneath the surface lies unmatched ruthlessness. To clients, Juk-Adan shows only the height of civility; once on a job, all bets are off. Juk-Adan will lie, cheat, steal, and kill—or have those in his employ do those things for him—in order to obtain what someone else has paid for. In order to ensure that he always gets what he seeks, Juk-Adan has surrounded himself with specialists in a variety of fields: psionic mind-influencers to pry information out of unsuspecting dupes, cutthroat minstrels to poison the drinks of interlopers, skilled half-giants to slay guards and scouts, light-footed rogues to sneak undetected into palaces, and even masters of arcane magic for when there is no alternative. Though Juk-Adan's caravan may look unremarkable at first glance, beneath its surface, each member of the caravan has a skill that is essential when taking (by force if necessary) that which their client seeks.

What Is For Sale?

Mar Juk-Adan's caravan is a mobile bazaar of strange and exotic goods. Though the dune trader does stock mundane supplies like food, water, and clothing, he is better known for his ever-changing supply of strange wares and contraband items. Below are just a few things that can be found in the cornucopia of strange items Juk-Adan has for sale.

Badges of Office: Mar Juk-Adan has the official robes and badges of office of templars of every city-state and will part with them for the right price and a promise to not reveal where they were obtained.

Cilops Eggs: Juk-Adan carries a set of four petrified cilops eggs. These eggs seem like stones to the casual observer. They are kept in a sand-filled case made of dark wood. Included in the sale is a ritual scroll that will transform the petrified eggs into live cilops eggs ready to hatch in a matter of days.

Renks: Juk-Adan always keeps several cases of renks on hand for sale to travelers headed into the deep desert. Renks are harmless slugs that hold water better than any waterskin and are easier to transport in significant quantities. Each renk provides one survival day to anyone that consumes it.

Writ of Passage for Eldaarich: One of the strangest items that Juk-Adan has for sale is this writ of passage, which claims to be able to grant the bearer entry into a city-state known as Eldaarich, though Juk-Adan does not include the location of this mystery city in the sale of the writ—that costs extra.

Dealing with Merchant Houses

It comes as no surprise that a man with a reputation like Juk-Adan's would eventually attract the attention of the wealthy and powerful. The various merchant houses of Athas sometimes employ Juk-Adan to get rare goods for them, but more often, the ware they seek is intrigue. For those with great wealth and connections, Juk-Adan allows his clients to name a different kind of "goods" as the object to be sought out: secrets, kidnappings, assassinations, and other political dealings. Should a noble with the right connections request that Juk-Adan bring him the head of an insolent rival, then Mar Juk-Adan delivers the goods just as he would anything else. Fortunately for the potential victims of the city-states, Mar Juk-Adan's shrewdness keeps him from staying in one place for too long, lest he make too many enemies.

Over the years, Juk-Adan has built a good, working relationship with House M'ke of Raam. Even with much of Raam in near-anarchy, Juk-Adan has no problem navigating the dangerous city in order to be in the service of House M'ke. Juk-Adan primarily provides security for high-ranking members of House M'ke; the "goods" that he is hired to obtain are powerful, trustworthy mercenaries that can be assured not to turn on their charges when danger approaches. Juk-Adan acts as a go-between and broker who negotiates for both House M'ke and the mercenaries, and secretly uses one of his caravan guards with a psionic talent for mind reading to weed out the greedy from the honorable.

Mar Juk-Adan's relationship with House Stel of Urik is not as mutually beneficial. Indeed, if Juk-Adan can be said to have truly made enemies of anyone, it is the leadership of House Stel. Over the years, Juk-Adan has stymied the plans of House Stel again and again by undermining their military power with treachery and guile. House Stel, whose martial might is unmatched among the merchant houses, has found itself the object of Juk-Adan's malevolent efforts so many times that the dune trader has a "death on sight" order at any House Stel mercantile outpost. Juk-Adan cannot approach the city of Urik on fear of death. That doesn't mean Juk-Adan's agents don't work in Urik on his behalf; he must simply be more circumspect there. He often deals with third parties for assistance.

The Hurrum Tent

When conducting business with a new client for the first time, Mar Juk-Adan always brings his customers into a special tent that travels everywhere with his caravan and is set up each night when camp is made. Inside this tent are many carpets and plush accommodations. Juk-Adan takes all of his meals in the tent and uses it for his quarters when no business is being conducted. The unique feature of the tent is the dozens of narrow, glass vials that hang from the ceiling. Inside each vial is a single insect known as a hurrum. The hurrums produce a soothing buzzing sound that, when in harmony with the many others hanging from the ceiling, create a gentle, droning symphony that Juk-Adan finds pleasant. Most visitors to the tent do as well, and business conducted in the tent tends to go favorably for Juk-Adan, who has become somewhat inured to the soothing effects of the hurrums over the years.

Hurrum Object	**Level 1 Hazard** XP 100
Detect Perception DC 10	**Initiative** -
HP 1	
AC 10, **Fortitude** 5, **Reflex** 10, **Will** –	
Immune forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage	
Triggered Actions	
Soothing Hum ✦ At-Will	
Trigger (No Action): A creature comes within 5 squares of the hurrum	
Target: The triggering creature.	
Effect: The target takes a -5 penalty to Insight and Perception checks until they are no longer within 5 squares of the hurrum. A creature can only suffer penalties from one hurrum at a time.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Disable:** Nature DC 14; the hurrum can be put to sleep with a sound matching its hum.	

Juk-Adan's Caravan Guard	Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid	XP 150
HP 48; Bloodied 24	Initiative +4
AC 19, Fortitude 17, Reflex 15, Will 14	Perception +8
Speed 6	
Traits	
☼ **Caravan Sentinel ✦ Aura** 1	
Enemies that start their turns adjacent to the caravan guard are slowed until the start of their next turn.	
Loyal Agent	
Before the encounter begins, the caravan guard declares one creature to be its master.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Carrikal** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage.	
⊛ **Dejada** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage.	
⸸ **Drive Back** (weapon) **✦ Encounter**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the caravan guard pushes the target 1 square and knocks it prone.	
Miss: Half damage and the caravan guard knocks the target prone.	
⸸ **Warning Slash** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage.	
Effect: Until the end of the caravan guard's next turn, if the target is adjacent to the caravan guard and makes an attack that does not include the caravan guard as a target, the target takes 10 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Intercept ✦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy within 5 squares makes an attack against the caravan guard's master.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The caravan guard shifts 4 squares and makes a *carrikal* attack against the triggering enemy.	
Str 18 (+5)	**Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 16 (+4)	**Int** 9 (+0) **Cha** 8 (+0)
Alignment unaligned	**Languages** Common

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast. Originally from Chattanooga, TN, his credits for Dungeons & Dragons include *Monster Manual 3*, the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Fallen Lands*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*, and *Monster Vault*.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S EYE ON THE REALMS

THE CIRCLE OF FANGS

by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by William O'Connor

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"Why the precise whereabouts of the rings can be traced, and what future purpose this rumored cabal of wizards might intend for wearers of those rings, are matters of much wild speculation."

Purple Dragons searching a house in Marsember after the mysterious death of its longtime owner (the trader Estran Vyathar, a suspected smuggler) found the expected: a network of secret passages and cellars full of heavy iron chests containing contraband. One chest resembled all the others except for contents both unexpected and grisly. By itself, in the otherwise empty chest, was a severed human hand.

The dismembered left hand had begun to wither, and in the expert opinion of Swordcaptain Merigo Dunstrand of the Dragons, had been sliced from the rest of the body (which was nowhere to be found) less than a year before. It showed no signs of undeath and was decomposing and mummifying in the usual manner. None know to whom the hand belonged originally, but it was wearing something that still interests War Wizards and Cormyrean courtiers (and increasingly, other folk across the Realms): a magic ring of a hitherto-unknown sort.

Dubbed the Circle of Fangs by the War Wizard investigators who examined it (Randaerl Lorthond and his younger trainee, Tamphara Azmuir), this plain-looking silver ring was untarnished despite its contact with decomposing flesh. It bears no markings except a small, simple circle graven on the outside of the band. When Lorthond placed it on his finger, his head filled immediately with silent mental visions showing him precisely how to will the ring to activate or cease functioning, and then the ring proceeded to display its uses to him. The same thing occurred when Tamphara donned it. Experimentation showed it worked on any finger or thumb—but not a toe—of either investigator. Both wizards successfully awakened and wielded the ring.

When the investigators passed the ring to more senior War Wizards, extensive experiments discovered that each time the ring is activated, it drains an almost imperceptible bit of energy from its wearer; just enough energy to accomplish ... what?

What the Ring Does

When the ring is triggered into action, a halo of six daggers appears in midair. These weapons look like identical, plain, metal daggers (with simple quillons, a large and flat pommel, and no wrappings on the grip). In fact, they are sharp-edged and -pointed slivers of magical force that look like solid metal. They don't react to magnetism or other forces in the way that metal would.

The daggers vary in size depending on who's wearing the ring. They are exactly twice the length of the wearer's ring hand from the base of the wrist to the tip of the longest finger. The diameter of the ring in which they appear is always the width of the ring-wearer's outstretched fingers and thumb.

The open center of the ring is always 12 feet directly in front of the longest finger of the ring-wearer's ring hand (and can be moved about by pointing or wiggling that finger). The ring of daggers can whirl to slash at foes and "tilt" individually to point in any or all directions, as their wielder wills. If a dagger is directed to thrust or stab, the entire ring moves with it.

The ring-wearer can choose to have all the daggers glow with a faint white radiance, or have them all emit no light but reflect like sharp, bright metal, or all be dark and nonreflective. If the ring wearer chooses no form, the daggers do not glow but are reflective. In all their forms, the daggers are silent (no metallic clangs or clashing sounds).

A Mystery Deepens

"A pretty little fighting toy" is how veteran War Wizard Amundras Fireweather judged the ring in a written report. He consigned the ring to secure storage in one of the hidden vaults maintained by the Wizards of War somewhere in central Cormyr. "More an oddity than of real consequence." However, that assessment—though Fireweather had no way of knowing so at the time—fell far short of the truth.

Some glimmer of the evaluation's inaccuracy began to occur to Cormyr's Wizards of War less than a tenday later, when two other rings of the same sort were promptly discovered. One was on a fine chain around the neck of a drowned grick, which was wearing a gold crown when a fisher's net dredged the creature up out of the Dragonmere. The other was found unharmed on the ashes of what once had been the right hand of a man who abruptly caught fire while walking down a street in Yhaunn at midday with no one nearby.

Such suspicious deaths are investigated, and so word of the second ring came to Cormyr wrapped in a rumor spread by friends and acquaintances of that dead man—or from clerks recording what they told local Sembian lawkeepers. The dead man was Baerlond Durvorkar, a short, scuttling, hairy seller of magic items, lore, and magic treasure maps. According to Durvorkar, who'd shown his new ring to several friends and neighboring merchants, all of these *circles of fangs* were created by a little-known cabal of wizards called the Fael Threl (words that mean "Watchful Wise" in Halruann), who can precisely trace the whereabouts of each and every such ring at all times.

War Wizards long ago learned the hard way not to dismiss rumors without investigation. Respected War

Wizard Ambrithra Ravensilver ordered the Marsemban ring to be retrieved, and she had it and the other two rings examined exhaustively. Durvorkar's ring had to be stolen from Sembian authorities, but the War Wizards accomplished that task with ease, substituting a superficially similar ring and apparently making off with the original undetected.

Senior War Wizards examined the three rings together at length. They discovered a webwork of unknown enchantments, the same on each ring, that could well involve some sort of remote tracing magic. All three rings had additional properties that were not mentally communicated to wearers.

As far as the War Wizards can tell, none had heard of the Fael Threl before Durvorkar's mention of that group. The magic seller enjoyed a shady reputation and far less than the status of a sage, but he was known as an exaggerator rather than a liar or a fabricator of full-blown fantasies. All the friends and acquaintances who heard his Fael Threl story believed it; investigators concluded that Durvorkar had nothing at all to gain by inventing such a story.

The War Wizards formed an investigative team to track down the Fael Threl—but the very night of their founding, three of the five War Wizards named to the team vanished from their (separate) lodgings in Suzail. On all of their beds, written in the blood of each missing wizard, was the same message: "Finding Us Will Cost You Dearer than This."

THE FAEL THREL

Officially, Cormyrean and Sembian authorities are silent about the rings and the murders of Durvorkar and the War Wizards. *The Hunting Horn of the Forest Kingdom*, the most sober and thoughtfully written broadsheet sold in Suzail, reported the deaths with a minimum of lurid detail, mentioned the rings, and added merely that "The identities and aims of the Fael Threl are, as of this writing, unknown, and they seem to want this state of public unawareness to continue. Why the precise whereabouts of the rings can be traced, and what future purpose this rumored cabal of wizards might intend for wearers of those rings, are matters of much wild speculation."

Those words very accurately sum up the current situation. The anonymous broadsheet writers even avoided repeating one rumor that the War Wizards think is likely true: That Durvorkar's fiery death was caused by the ring he was wearing and was worked from afar through the ring. They did mention (correctly) that, "Investigations by our Wizards of War continue, but as yet have yielded nothing."

Ring of Circling Fangs **Level 20**

This slim, silver ring is engraved with a simple circle.

Item Slot: Ring 125,000 gp

Property: While you are bloodied, you gain an aura of force daggers. Any adjacent creature that attacks you takes 10 force damage.

Property: As a minor action, you can cause the daggers to shed dim light to a radius of 5 squares. The light can be extinguished with a free action.

Power (Encounter ✦ Force): Standard Action. *Effect:* One creature within 3 squares of you takes 20 force damage.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the *Forgotten Realms* on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

Explore Taer Lian Doresh: Agents and Enemies

By Jeff LaSala

illustration by Craig J. Spearing

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With jingle-jangs and fripperies,
With tocsin tones and chiming knees,
With sweets and games all sure to please,
Who comes to town with all of these?

What's that sound? What's that sound?
The Harlequinade! The Harlequinade!
Whose voices sing a playful round?
The Harlequinade! The Harlequinade!

Who paints a smile on every face?
The Harlequinade! The Harlequinade!
Who rights each frown with laughing grace?
The Harlequinade! The Harlequinade!

What do you call the time of your life?
The Harlequinade! The Harlequinade!
What do you call wits sharp as a knife?
The Harlequinade! The Harlequinade!

(Excerpt of boisterous chant sung by a trio of curious, motley gnomes in a village square.)

PARAGON 11-20

The inauspicious few who know about the Fortress of Fading Dreams either try to forget they do or attempt to use this knowledge for personal gain. Taer Lian Doresh is a city out of myths where ancient minds contemplate revenge against the world outside, where hope is leached away by fear, where nightmares are clothed in flesh. Although knowledge of the Fortress and its location can grant one considerable power, it also invites attention from those within—and few things are more perilous than earning the interest of these sinister fey. Yet not all who come and go within its halls serve its interests. In fact, some might even ally against Shan Doresh, the feyspire's eladrin lord. But in Taer Lian Doresh alliances—like dreams—are doomed to fade.

Adjuvant, Envoy of Blades

When word reached the Lord of Blades that a feyspire had been discovered in the forests of the Lhazaar mainland, he dispatched agents to learn more about it. Upon hearing that it was a place of fleshbound nightmares, he wasted no time in sending one of his most trusted servants: Adjuvant, warrior envoy, who often spoke for the Lord of Blades when the warforged tyrant sought allies against the Five Nations. Adjuvant was tasked with making contact with the Lord of the Fading Dream on behalf of his lord. It took a very long time to find Taer Lian Doresh, but at last he succeeded. Upon entering the Fortress, Adjuvant extended a diplomatic, three-fingered hand in greeting—and was promptly refused exit. There were no discussions or exchange of court protocols. He'd become a prisoner.

The warforged are of great interest to Shan Doresh; they are a young race even by human standards, artificial yet living, and they do not sleep or dream. The eladrin lord allows Adjuvant to wander the halls of Taer Lian Doresh freely—that he might study him when he so chooses—but he does not allow the warforged to find the way out. Shan Doresh's subjects have been instructed not to harm Adjuvant except in self-defense.

Hook: Prison Break

Adjuvant is a deeply frustrated warforged. He has been ordered by the Lord of Blades to maintain diplomatic relations, but he is a warrior at heart and he has been made a captive. Should he fight his way out—he is sorely outmatched by the numerous and powerful fey—or is finding the labyrinth's exit merely a test? The predicament is an elaborate puzzle box he must solve; therefore he spends his time studying the feyspire and searching for clues. If he meets visitors such as the player characters, he seeks an alliance.

But in Adjuvant the player characters find a dangerous ally. As a Blade, he is contemptuous of all "breathers" but he realizes he might need assistance to escape. Other warforged could discover that he is recruiting for the Lord of Blades. If the player characters refuse to assist him, Adjuvant almost certainly attacks. Even if they succeed in helping him escape Taer Lian Doresh, the warforged envoy likely turns on them when the Fortress is safely behind. If they do not serve the interest of the Lord of Blades, they are a liability.

Adjuvant in Combat

Adjuvant travels and fights alone, but he has a few tricks up his composite sleeve when the odds are stacked against him. Although he relies on his axe in the heat of battle, the haft at the other end serves as a short-ranged wand of fire. With the authority given him by the Lord of Blades, Adjuvant can temporarily immobilize his foes using *halting words* and will do so early in a fight; he is brutally effective at cutting down those who balk before him. When the tide of battle turns against him, his *ruthless retaliation* tends to even the score.

Encounter Group

When Adjuvant is expecting a fight, he can conjure a pair of grasping statues carved to resemble himself by tossing an enchanted scrap of metal to the ground: a handmade gift from the Lord of the Blades himself. The statues crumble to dust when they are slain or when the encounter has ended.

Level 13 Encounter (XP 4,400)

- Adjuvant (level 16 elite soldier)
- 2 grasping statues (level 13 controller, *Dungeon* #156)

Adjuvant **Level 16 Elite Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (living construct) XP 2,800
HP 312; **Bloodied** 156 **Initiative** +12
AC 32, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28 **Perception** +16
Speed 5
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Against the Odds
Adjuvant gains a +1 bonus to melee attacks when he is adjacent to more than one enemy.

Overbearing Stance
Adjuvant cannot be the target of forced movement by enemies he has marked.

Standard Actions

Greataxe (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 11 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Adjuvant's next turn.

Fire Wand (fire) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d10 + 7 fire damage, and the target falls prone.

Halting Words (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in burst); +19 vs. Will
Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends).
Effect: Adjuvant can reroll a *greataxe* attack he makes against any enemy immobilized by *halting words*. He must use the second roll, even if it's lower.

Minor Actions

Envoy's Resolve (healing) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Adjuvant gains 15 temporary hit points and can make a saving throw against an ongoing damage effect. If he uses this power while bloodied, he also regains 15 hit points.

Triggered Actions

Ruthless Retaliation (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: Adjuvant is bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Adjuvant makes a *greataxe* attack against all enemies adjacent to him.

Skills Diplomacy +18, Endurance +18, Intimidate +18
Str 23 (+14) **Dex** 14 (+10) **Wis** 17 (+11)
Con 20 (+13) **Int** 21 (+13) **Cha** 20 (+13)
Alignment evil
Languages Common, Draconic, Elven
Equipment plate armor, greataxe, short sword

Amdrashar, Consul of the Dreaming Dark

Since the stranding of the feyspires on the Day of Mourning, the Dreaming Dark has taken a keen interest in them—but none more than Taer Lian Doresh. Although the Fortress's existence on both Dal Quor and Eberron does not make it a standing doorway between the two, it *is* a window through which the quori can extend physical hands. Perhaps it can be exploited in their schemes. Recently, it has fallen to Amdrashar of Riedra to investigate Taer Lian Doresh from the vantage of the waking world.

Of the few quori granted permission to come and go within its halls in Dal Quor, she is the only one who can exit onto Eberron because that is her point of entry—as one of the Inspired. She is an esteemed Riedran consul, tasked with representing the Dreaming Dark's worldly interests among the nightmare fey. The Dreaming Dark plays a delicate game, because the quori must defer to Shan Doresh's laws if they are to retain access to the Fortress.

Like all of the Inspired, Amdrashar appears to be a human of unearthly beauty with vaguely elven features and a fiendish grace. Behind this veneer of elegance lurks a malignant spirit as vile as her plans. Whenever she sets foot within the Fortress of Fading Dreams, her true self—a hashalaq quori—is forcefully separated from her host body, where she can float freely beside it. Only in Taer Lian Doresh can one of the Inspired be encountered as two separate bodies: the humanlike vessel and the quori itself. In this state, the vessel's mind regains control of its body, though it has been conditioned since birth to obey and defend the quori.

Hashalaq quori usually assume a humanoid form, but their bodies are composed of hundreds of flexible, jellylike tendrils that can stretch or compress into many different shapes. Amdrashar arranges the fine coils of her body to resemble that of a woman in flowing blue robes, with both capillary hair and soft, mesmerizing light issuing from a deep hood.

Amdrashar in Combat

Physical violence of any kind is a personal failure to Amdrashar; her goals are far too important to risk even a few rounds of combat, but she is deadly when forced into it. Because of *astute observer*, she can read the thoughts of those around her and benefit from powerful insight. She attempts to use *mindwipe* at the battle's outset to soften enemy minds to her psychic attacks and use *dreamstealer's charm* to dominate chosen foes. If threatened by a particular opponent, she uses *familiar face* against him or her, appearing in their mind's eye as a close friend or family member they dare not strike. *Empathic feedback* is Amdrashar's most powerful defense, ensuring that those who would harm her suffer as greatly as her.

Hook: Damsel in Disguise

Amdrashar can be encountered both within Taer Lian Doresh (in her true quori form, drifting beside her vessel) or without (as an Inspired, quori and vessel combined), studying the nature of the Fortress and its unique planar duality. She does not serve Shan Doresh, but she is considered a welcome guest of the nightmare fey and treats them with outward respect. As a loremaster of the quori, she naturally involves herself in the intrigues of Taer Lian Doresh, its visitors, and its victims. Using her *malleable form*, she usually wears the guise of a visitor to the Fortress to fool other visitors—perhaps as a Karrnathi ambassador, a Lhazaarite explorer, or a wizard of the Twelve. She typically adopts a demure persona to earn the trust and protection of those she wishes to study and inevitably betray.

Amdrashar enjoys greater freedoms within Taer Lian Doresh than most quori. She can wander the labyrinthine passages above and below the feyspire without expressed permission. If the player characters have ever made an enemy of the Dreaming Dark, Amdrashar can be called upon to eliminate them. When she must kill, she prefers to manipulate others into the murderous act, but if her plans unravel she will do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Amdrashar's Entourage

Amdradhar is seldom alone, even when she appears to be. She routinely keeps a small group of servitors on hand. Among them are the wraiths of some of her previous victims who were driven to rapturous madness before she killed them. If she is encountered outside of Taer Lian Doresh, Amdrashar possesses the same statistics as a Dreaming Dark Assassin (*Eberron Campaign Guide*, page 192). Within the Fortress, she can be battled in her true and more powerful form as a halashaq quori (statistics on page 8) side by side with the Inspired vessel she normally inhabits.

Level 17 Encounter (XP 9,000)

- ✦ Amdrashar (level 18 elite controller)
- ✦ 1 Inspired vessel (level 9 skirmisher)
- ✦ 4 shattered wraiths (level 16 lurker minions; *Dungeon* #163)
- ✦ 2 sword wraiths (level 17 lurker; *Monster Manual*, page 267)

Amdrashar **Level 18 Elite Controller**
Medium immortal magical beast (quori) XP 4,000

HP 348; **Bloodied** 174 **Initiative** +12
AC 32, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28 **Perception** +18
Speed 8, fly 8 (hover)
Immune fear; **Resist** 5 psychic
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Astute Observer
Amdrashar cannot be surprised. Amdrashar also has a +2 bonus to Bluff and Insight checks (this bonus is already factored into statistics below).

Standard Actions

Idyllic Touch (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 13 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). If the target is already immobilized, it loses one healing surge.

Dreamstealer's Charm (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +22 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends).

Mindwipe (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 10 (enemies in burst); +22 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 8 psychic damage, and the target is dazed and gains psychic vulnerability 5 (save ends both).

Move Actions

Familiar Face (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +22 vs. Will
Hit: The creature cannot attack Amdrashar (save ends, with a -2 penalty to the saving throw). Amdrashar can affect only one creature at a time with this power.

Minor Actions

Malleable Form (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Amdrashar can alter her physical form to take on the appearance of any Medium humanoid, including a unique individual.

Triggered Actions

Empathic Feedback (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: Amdrashar is hit with a damaging attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The attack deals half damage to Amdrashar and half to the triggering attacker. The damage taken becomes psychic damage.

Skills Bluff +24, Insight +20, Intimidate +22, Stealth +17
Str 14 (+11) **Dex** 16 (+12) **Wis** 18 (+13)
Con 22 (+15) **Int** 24 (+16) **Cha** 26 (+17)
Alignment evil
Languages Common, Quori, telepathy 10

Inspired Vessel **Level 9 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (Inspired) XP 400

HP 95; **Bloodied** 47 **Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21 **Perception** +10
Speed 6 Low-light vision

Traits

Combat Advantage
A vessel deals 2d6 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Standard Actions

Blade of Focus (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Dagger Dance (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.
Effect: The vessel shifts 2 squares and makes a second attack against the same target or a different one.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

Triggered Actions

Dreamstab (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy hits the vessel with a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The vessel uses *blade of focus* against the triggering creature, then shifts 3 squares.

Skills Bluff +13, Diplomacy +13, Stealth +12
Str 13 (+5) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 13 (+5)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 20 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+8)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Quori
Equipment cloth armor, dagger

The Harlequinade

When it was clear that Taer Lian Doresh wasn't going to drift back to Dal Quor, the Region of Dreams, Shan Doresh summoned his royal advisors. Among these was Marrot the Fool, an old friend, court jester, and patriarch of a clan of gnome troubadours known across all of Thelanis. The Shrouded Sages were also consulted and, under Santyriana's direction, brewed a philter that would incite nightmares in those mortals who drank of it. More importantly, the spirits of these dreamers would be summoned to Taer Lian Doresh as they slept, to bear the scrutiny of the Fading Dream. Their plan was to begin exploring the wishes and fears of everyday people, soldiers, and rulers of Khorvaire and beyond. When the time was right, it was Marrot who volunteered the service of his gnome kinfolk, whose task it became to carry their sweet and soporific draught into the larger world. And so the Harlequinade was born.

On the surface, the Harlequinade appears to be a traveling troupe of comedic performers, minstrels, and sideshow hawkers who provide entertainment for coin. Brightly colored wagons festooned with bells and garish, motley costumes are their hallmarks. As their caravans approach a village, jovial barkers skip ahead and spread word of their arrival and of the sights, sounds, and spectacles they offer. The Harlequinade specializes in madcap antics, buffoonery, and scurrilous music. Yet beneath the mask of comedy, they are still agents of the Fading Dream, purveyors of a nightmare-inducing potion.

The fey of the Harlequinade answer chiefly to their patriarch, Marrot, who remains at his lord's side in Taer Lian Doresh, but they unswervingly serve the interests of the Fading Dream as a whole. The troupe consists mostly of gnomes, but a few eladrin, nymphs, and satyrs have joined in their sinister brand of merrymaking. Without exception, all members are *wyrds*, fey from Taer Lian Doresh, and all well remember their "sojourn" in Dal Quor. It is some of that unspeakable horror they wish to impress upon their audience.

The gnomes of the Harlequinade each look a little different, but there is a subtle uniformity to their dress and appearance. Some aspects of their costumes might even be part of their Dal Quor-twisted bodies: what appears to be a gnome on stilts might, in fact, be a gnome with grotesquely long legs; a contortionist's natural position might *be* contorted; oversized shoes might be oversized feet; a blood-red, bulbous nose might not be a prosthetic. In addition, all the gnomes of the Harlequinade have a row of sharp, interlocking teeth like a piranha's.

Harlequins in Combat

The gnomes of the Harlequinade delight in violence. They use their clublike *battes* (slapsticks) to daze their opponents with thunderous force as they prance and somersault across the battlefield using *fray & cavort*, frustrating most attempts to pin them down. When more than one enemy is dazed, they use *withering pantomime* to devastate them; if only one enemy is dazed, they'll give them a *fool's bite*.

Hook: To Sleep, Perchance to Scream

Keeping well away from major cities and the attention of other feyspires, Harlequinade caravans travel only to small rustic towns in Khorvaire, falsifying an association to House Phiarlan and its famous Carnival of Shadows to attract paying customers. These pernicious fey have one goal—to recruit nightmares from abroad—but they are still entertainers at the core and enjoy delighting their victims before ensnaring them. Members of the crowd who look powerful or interesting become candidates for the *philters of the Fading Dream* they carry: The gnomes slip the potion into drinks at the first opportunity or even give it to candidates outright as a sweet confectionary beverage. Then they'll let the *philters*, and Shrouded Sages back home, take it from there.

Send in the Clowns!

It's rare to find any members of the Harlequinade alone. In addition to the strength in numbers they prefer, the gnomes travel with hired or coerced muscle.

Level 9 Encounter (XP 2,450)
- ✦ 4 Harlequinade gnomes (level 8 skirmishers)
- ✦ 3 human mercenaries (level 3 soldier)
- ✦ 2 mercenary wizards (level 7 artillery)

Player characters will inevitably be targeted. All others are fair game for the slaughter, provided the gnomes can catch their victims alone or without risk of garnering the attention of local authorities. The Harlequinade sometimes kidnaps choice victims before stealing away like gypsies. Some of their "hired hands" and sideshow freaks were once delighted audience members.

Harlequinade Gnome — **Level 8 Skirmisher**
Small fey humanoid — XP 350

HP 91; **Bloodied** 45 — **Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19 — **Perception** +11
Speed 6 — Low-light vision
Immune dazed, fear; **Resist** 5 psychic
Saving Throws +2 against immobilized, slowed

Standard Actions

Slapstick (thunder, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 7 thunder damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Fool's Bite ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one dazed creature); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the gnome's next turn.

Withering Pantomime (psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in burst); +11 vs. Will
Hit: 2d12 + 5 psychic damage, and the gnome slides the target 2 squares. If the target is dazed or stunned, the attack deals 1d12 extra damage.
Effect: The gnome shifts 2 squares before or after the attack.

Move Actions

Dark Step (teleport) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The gnome teleports 5 squares and gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn.

Fray & Cavort ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The gnome shifts 5 squares.

Triggered Actions

Fade Away (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The gnome takes damage.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The gnome becomes invisible until after it hits or misses with an attack or until the end of its next turn.

Skills Acrobatics +14, Bluff +12, Intimidate +12, Stealth +14, Thievery +14

Str 15 (+6)	**Dex** 20 (+9)	**Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 19 (+8)	**Int** 15 (+6)	**Cha** 17 (+7)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment slapstick

Heroic Nightmares

As noted in its first article in *Dungeon* #178, Taer Lian Doresh is a paragon tier location. It was suggested that agents of the fey might approach the characters during the heroic tier to study them, intent on luring them to Taer Lian Doresh only when their nightmares are ripe—but you have other ways to use the Fortress early in your campaign. The gnomes of the Harlequinade (level 8 monsters) and the *philters of the Fading Dream* are one such way. The *philters* are more of a plot device and adventure hook than a portable magic item.

If the characters drink of the *philters*—knowingly or not!—you can bring them in spirit to Taer Lian Doresh in a dream sequence. Even outmatched by the powerful, paragon-tiered fey of the Fading Dream, they can explore the ancient feyspire and interact with its denizens without the risk of death (though they can find worse fates there). Consider making this a side trek adventure or a taste of what's to come if you intend to use Taer Lian Doresh in the paragon tier. There needn't even be combat, but if a fight breaks out, there shouldn't be any long-term mechanical danger. If a player character is "killed" during these nocturnal adventures, he or she will merely awaken. You might impose some sort of penalty for "dying" in a dream, such as the temporary loss of a healing surge or two. At the very least, characters might earn the ire of the Fading Dream.

So what do the fey want? Shan Doresh and his subjects wish to observe the spirits of dreamers and the nightmares they engender. When the player characters dream and "arrive" at the gates of Taer Lian Doresh, they might be observed discreetly or they might be ambushed, shackled, and brought before any of the notable fey: Santyriana, the Shrouded Sages, the Paranymph, or even Shan Doresh himself (or any of the nonplayer characters in this article). Or perhaps they'll be left to wander freely like Adjuvant, to be studied by unseen fey.

Through the *philters*, the lords of the Fading Dream could learn more about the state of Eberron, the powers and treasures to be exploited, and the heroes arrayed against them. Just the same, such an encounter can inform the player characters of threats to come. Most imbibers of the *philter* eventually awake in a fevered sweat from their ordeal, their memory of the nightmare fading quickly. The player characters, however, are not most people; they will remember what they saw.

Keith Baker's novel *The Faded Dream* (October 2010) provides a deeper look into the story of Taer Lian Doresh and its lords.

Bad Dreams

Every wagon or caravan of the Harlequinade contains at least one cache of *philters of the Fading Dream*. They are bottled in unassuming, colorful glass vials and smell and taste like sweet, peculiar liqueurs, but these sinister gnomes are not above using the *philter* as an ingredient in the making of sweetmeats for children. Only the Shrouded Sages in Taer Lian Doresh can brew the *philters*. Whenever a caravan runs out, the Harlequinade gnomes return home for a fresh supply.

Philter of the Fading Dream **Level 8+**

This delicious nectar tastes of a bittersweet wine, but it ensures that its imbiber will not rest easy.

Other Consumable 200 gp

Power (Consumable): Minor Action. The next time you take an extended rest, you fall into a deep sleep, whereupon your dream spirit is summoned to the halls of Taer Lian Doresh.

Sidgevin, Viscount Vindicator

The Fortress of Fading Dreams numbers more than three thousand eladrin within its ancient and disquieting halls, but none cries for the blood of outsiders more than Sidgevin. Formerly viscount of a small domain just outside of Shae Doresh before it was exiled to Dal Quor, Sidgevin answered his liege's call to arms against the giants and met the same fate as all the fey in the Spire of Dreams. Now denied sovereign authority of his own, Sidgevin's frustration and rage has given him an obsessive lust for slaughter and made him Shan Doresh's personal attack dog. Foregoing fear as a weapon, Sidgevin is one of the few of the Fading Dream fey who would rather slay than torment an enemy. Accordingly, Sidgevin regularly counsels Shan Doresh to avenge and subjugate the mortal world, not merely study and exploit it. This bloodlust has denied him a place among his liege's elite Knights of Terror, another frustration poisoning his pride.

Sidgevin appears like any regal eladrin warrior, handsome and resplendent in mithral chainmail, the very picture of a forest lord from ancient tales. Yet like all fey of the Fading Dream, his noble personage includes the unsettling aspects of a nightmare. Sidgevin wears his contempt for outsiders like a mask he cannot remove, exuding hate in a palpable rage.

Tactics

Although he's tougher than he looks, Sidgevin stays on the offense at all times. His favored weapon is a double-bladed khopesh which roils with black smoke and stretches its size on a whim. When he is sufficiently surrounded, he uses *bladesmoke* to injure as many of his enemies as possible while obscuring himself at the same time. He *repels* especially dangerous opponents and uses his javelin to pin down those who would escape him. *No quarter* is reserved for his favored enemy, usually one of the player characters who has insulted him the most or proves the hardest to kill.

Sidgevin's Lackeys

A duelist at heart, Sidgevin prefers to challenge his enemies one on one. However, when he expects to challenge multiple foes, he is sure to include a pair of loyal fearmongers.

Level 16 Encounter (XP 7,600)

- Sidgevin (level 19 elite soldier)
- 2 Fading Dream fearmongers (level 16 artillery; *Eberron Campaign Guide*, page 144)

Hook: Throwing Down the Gauntlet

Sidgevin craves violence. He seeks any excuse to shed the blood of his enemies, and to him, everyone who is not part of the Fading Dream is an enemy. The moment he is made aware of visitors to Taer Lian Doresh, Sidgevin makes his presence known—especially to player characters. If they are invited on peaceable terms, he adopts an arrogant civility that poorly conceals his hate, seeking any excuse to be insulted or to hear his lord slandered. In short, he is spoiling for a fight at all times and will seek the permission from Shan Doresh to challenge the player characters. Even under a truce, Sidgevin looks for a loophole.

About the Author

Jeff LaSala is a writer of speculative fiction and an artificer of RPGs. His Eberron novel, *The Darkwood Mask*, was nominated for the Scribe Award and showcases his love for all things dark, monstrous, and masked. Many of his ideas are drawn from the cthonic depths of New York City, where he (roll 1d4):

1—Dwells with an Argentine mermaid—and married her.
2—Masquerades as a normal person.
3—Imagines a world splintered into sorry hemispheres.
4—Lurks like a gargoyle over his website: ashlock.org.

Sidgevin **Level 19 Elite Soldier**
Medium fey humanoid XP 4,800

HP 352; **Bloodied** 176 **Initiative** +17
AC 35, **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 31 **Perception** +19
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Immune fear; **Resist** 5 psychic
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Deadly Assertion ✦ Aura 1
When any enemy within the aura makes an attack that does not include Sidgevin as a target, Sidgevin can make a khopesh attack against it.

Standard Actions

Khopesh (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +26 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 9 damage, and the target is marked (save ends).

Repel (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +26 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and is stunned (save ends).

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +26 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 14 damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of Sidgevin's next turn.

Bladesmoke (weapon, zone) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 2 (each enemy in burst); +24 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d8 + 9 damage.
Effect: Sidgevin creates a zone in a close burst 2 that lasts until the end of Sidgevin's next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all creatures except Sidgevin.

Move Actions

Dark Step (teleport) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Sidgevin teleports 5 squares and gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of his next turn.

Minor Actions

Mounting Rage (weapon, zone) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in burst); +22 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d8 + 9 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Triggered Actions

No Quarter (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: A marked enemy within 2 squares of Sidgevin is bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Sidgevin makes a khopesh attack against the triggering enemy.

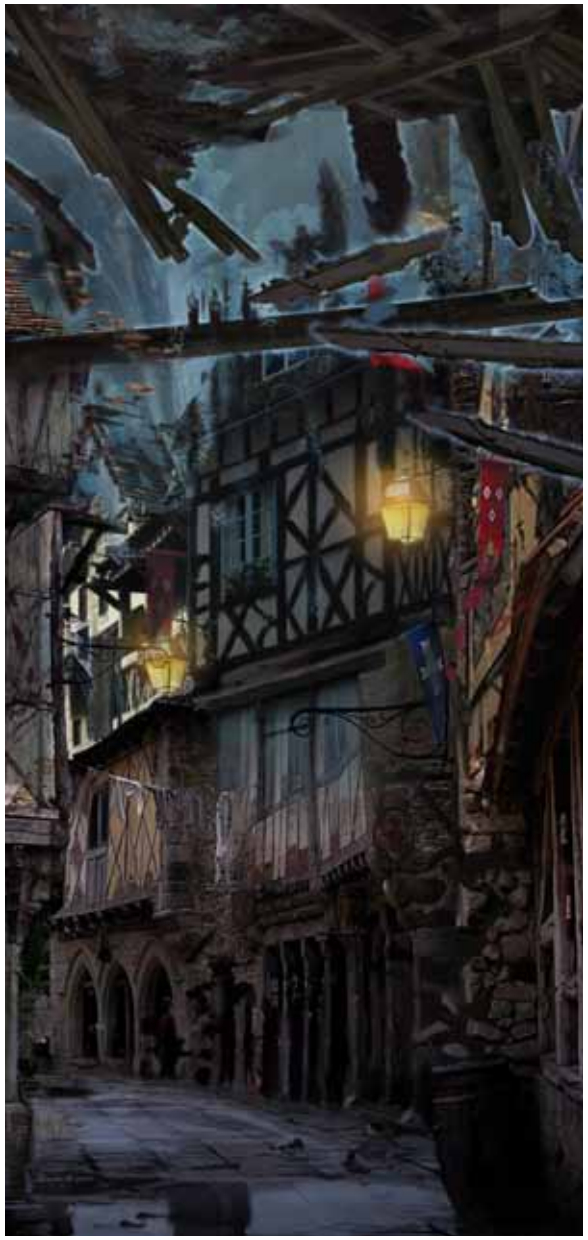
Skills Athletics +20, Intimidate +16

Str 22 (+15)	**Dex** 22 (+15)	**Wis** 21 (+14)
Con 16 (+12)	**Int** 18 (+13)	**Cha** 15 (+11)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment chainmail, longsword, 10 javelins

Taking Time on the Other Side

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
illustration by Rob Alexander



I went to Gen Con this year–the first time in 10 years going on my own dime–and it was awesome! I played a lot of games (my group won the D&D Open Championship, and yes I'm bragging), talked to old friends, and more importantly, watched other DMs work. I played under and watched a lot of DMs. This is a bit of a rarity (that I played, not that the DMs were good). As a habitual DM, I rarely swap sides of the DM's screen. I'm OK with that because I love the continual buzz of DMing. When I do play, because I'm not constantly on the run, I watch other DMs and learn from them.

I'm not talking about the products they use for tracking. What I'm talking about are the decisions made and practices performed by those DMs and their patterns of use. You can't buy these tricks, and you need to train your eye to catch them. You have to watch, recollect, and learn.

These, I think, are the most important tips I picked up from other DMs throughout the weekend. Many of them I knew and even practiced to some extent, but the stellar DMs at the RPGA area showed me ways to improve and perfect them.

For those who may be scoffing at my mention of RPGA DMs—don't. These are talented and dedicated folks who hail from all over the world and descend like red-shirted locusts into the Sagamore Ballroom to ensure four days of D&D bliss. Most run their own beloved home games on top of the hours spent prepping and presenting various offerings from the D&D organized play program. RPGA DMs easily clock more hours of D&D than four or five home game-only DMs combined. This practice is a crucible for proficiency. If you want to improve your skill as a DM, I would suggest volunteering to run games for the RPGA.

Let the Players Manage Themselves

I've actually discussed this topic extensively and provided quite a few tips on how you can do it, but here's a definite rule: When a player asks you if they can track initiative or any other transparent aspect of the game, you say yes. When you're DMing, you are handling so many variables and listening to so many voices that any help you can get from the players is gaming gold. It frees up your time for more important things like tactics and roleplaying.

What do I mean by a transparent aspect of the game? Anything you and the players should both know. Traditionally things like hit points and defenses have been off that list, but to be honest, if you're looking to speed up your game (not to mention your precision when it comes to these numbers) and your group is—shall we say—mechanically inclined, you may want to give it a shot. Many groups track defenses anyway, and there are even some that will

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track damage and estimate hit points based on when a monster becomes bloodied. You might as well put that brainpower to work. I know, this kind of pure gameism chips away at some beloved illusions of RPGs, but some groups find the increased transparency satisfying. You can also be a little choosy when you decide to do it. If you have a whole gaggle of monsters on the field (minions or not), being transparent with the cannon fodder frees up more time and brainpower for the meatier and less predictable challenges.

Just having the players track initiative and conditions speeds your play, frees up precious brainpower and time to describe environments, to roleplay, and to run encounters. In a convention environment, it ensures that you can run those fun but stressful timed encounters in events like the Dungeons & Dragons Championship, the D&D Delve, and Living Forgotten Realms Battle Interactive. I know what some of you are thinking; I suffer the same thoughts. *The DM is the ultimate authority at the table*. Authority often doesn't like to relinquish control, but sometimes it should.

Speed and Music

Here is a very simple trick for any DM that's often hard to execute: let the players choose the speed of play. RPGA DMs, the ones who have been doing it for years, are really good at this. They know nothing frustrates a fast group as much as a DM that seems to be slowing down, and nothing bewilders a slow group like a lightning fast DM. Even the same group will vary its speed of play based on a number of factors. As the pace of play increases and decreases, you should match it. This will help with both the narrative and the combat pacing.

This assumes that you can run a game quickly. If you're a new DM or you haven't had much practice at shifting gears, the thought of trying to manage a really fast-moving game may make your hair stand on end. How many mistakes are you going to make? At first . . . probably a lot. But give it time. Like anything else, you become better by practicing. Don't sweat small hiccups. Every time you recognize a mistake, you've learned something you can do better.

For example, in an attempt to speed up my game and be more environmentally friendly (I'll admit it, I'm a secret hippie), I started tracking initiative on a really cool iPhone app rather than my handy-dandy index cards. Unfortunately, I could not get the phone to think faster than my hands can move. The result was that using the app slowed me down, and I had to abandon it. Sometimes the best tool for the job is low tech.

Once you learn to sync your tempo with your group's, the next step is to learn how to subtly speed things up and slow things down as a means of controlling tension and tone. A soundtrack helps with this trick. It's not particularly effective in the middle of a convention hall, but I have speakers for my iPad and have started fooling around with creating gaming soundtracks that let me change tempo like a DJ. The result is fascinating and very effective (as TV, stage, and film directors have known for a long time). Groups will adjust their speed of play to match the tempo of the music. It won't change *dramatically*. A fast group will still run fast, just not as fast. But music is a great tool for creating tension and altering the mood and rhythm between scenes of exploration, suspense, puzzle-solving, and combat. You don't need an iPad to do it; a few purpose-made CDs and a simple stereo with a remote track-changer will due. No matter how you store the music, be sure to keep a playlist handy so you can find the tune you're looking for.

Respond to Roleplaying

Not every group roleplays. There are a lot of combat monkeys out there, and even groups that think they are hardcore roleplayers might be surprised at how crunchy they really are, if they had a chance to sit back and watch themselves play. It's easy in the rush of conditions, modifiers, and questions about forced movement to skip right over a player's attempt at real roleplaying when it pops up. Keep an ear open and be ready to respond.

At the first hint of roleplaying, respond in kind. Your response doesn't need to be elaborate; it can be downright simple, even corny, but a player who gets into role is a player who wants to engage the game on a level other than the purely mechanical. Having you step up to the challenge validates that player's action. When I say validate, I don't mean anything cheap or tawdry. It's another way to use the skill of saying yes, and here's why it's important. Validation is not about *giving* the players everything they want; it's about *responding to* their wants. When you ignore the roleplayer, that player feels cheated, awkward, or even embarrassed. This doesn't go just for strangers at conventions, either. Even longtime friends who know you and (in my case) tolerate your quirks feel dejected when faced with validation denial. A good DM challenges and validates with equal measure. It's the recipe of fun.

The issue is not only one of reactively responding; it's also about proactively fostering an atmosphere that encourages roleplaying. I've heard many times from players, in person and on the web, that they don't feel 4E fosters roleplaying. I heard those arguments in the days of 3E, too. Heck, I've heard them about D&D since I started playing, and competing RPGs try to use this sentiment as a selling point. The truth is that a system can affect roleplaying only in very limited ways. Validating other's engagement with a response is a far greater promoter of roleplaying.

Other DMs Can Be Your Greatest Teachers

I want to thank all my DMs and the DMs who did not mind (or notice) me hovering over their shoulders during games. Each session and each moment of observation was a learning experience. Every DM should take some time on the other side of the screen. I know, there is often a dearth of DMs and it is hard to find the opportunity, but pick a show, a night, or even ask for the opportunity as a birthday gift. Who's going to deny a DM wanting to be a player on his or her birthday? Maybe we should form DM clubs, like book clubs, but instead of reading a book, all the DMs run the same adventure and compare notes during prep, running, and wrap-up. Hmmm. Maybe I'll get on that.

Now, let's leap into the mailbag.

Managing Player Types

First, thanks for loads of useful tips. I've been an old school D&D gamer since 87-mostly as a player. I've been running an Eberron campaign since January with a great group of players and have a question for you. With five players who each are a mix of the following player types-actor, explorer, instigator, and thinker. What is the best way to make them all feel like their characters are special and that the game doesn't focus on one or two of the PCs? When I was younger and playing, it didn't seem as important. There was treasure to be had and monsters to be killed and that was enough for everyone. My players definitely want story-which I've been providing. The hardest part is to make them each feel like they have a starring role.

-User Totendal via Wizards Community Message

You are more than welcome. It's a real treat to be able to provide tips and advice each month. As for your problem, I feel for you. I think the best way to do it is having rotating star characters. Find inspiration from serialized television shows and comic books. Lost, True Blood, or even Entourage can provide excellent structures for taking a session or an encounter and letting one or more characters shine.

For example, imagine the classic 'awakening colossus' encounter. One wrong move and the massive construct lurches to life, a shambling master of destruction. These are the kinds of encounters that instigators love, especially if you use the classic trope of the activation being contingent on making a wrong move (e.g., the beginning scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). But it doesn't have to end there. Having a secret control that can be used to shut down the construct once it's bloodied can reward the explorer that found it by searching or deciphering the hieroglyphics along a section of wall. The control can be a puzzle or a controlling homunculus-like creature with a cheeky sense of humor, depending on whether or not you want the explorer or the thinker or the actor to shine.

The trick is to infuse *small* rewards for traits throughout encounters as well as using them to inform overall campaign judgments. We like rewards both big and small. Make sure that you still allow for the normal assumptions of D&D—problems should be solvable with skills, weapons, or ideas. Sometimes even the most consistent instigator can miss his cue.

Problem Player, Need Solution

My problem player has a cycle: he will join a lot of games, be enthusiastic about them all and his characters, and contribute to the game. Then there is a long downward spiral. The length of time differs, but after six months or a year, he becomes noticeably disruptive before finally doing something in-game that either causes his character to die, be arrested, or be banned from a game, usually while backstabbing or sabotaging the rest of the party. He drops out of all of his games usually around that same time, then disappears off the face of the earth for a year or so, before announcing that he wants to start gaming again.

-Iamarouge from the Save My Game Wizards Community group

Wow. It sounds like this player may be having some personal issues in his life, for which he may need some help. Be a good friend first, and respectfully and empathetically try to get him help if he needs it. It may be nothing, he might just be that kind of dude, but it's better to be safe than sorry. Be honest

and frank with him. Let him know how his behavior is affecting other people and when it is unacceptable. You don't need to get in his grill, but don't be a push-over either.

That done, you must weigh the pros and cons of his participation. He seems like a great person to play with during the ups of the cycle and a royal pain in the butt when he is down. Is the downside worth it? That's something only you and your fellow players can answer. If it's not, maybe he should find a new group.

Let's say he is worth it. Let him make characters that compliment his cycles. Have him play characters that can easily whisk in and out of the game. Maybe he has a magical curse that adversely affects his personality. Maybe he is the son of the god of chaos. Maybe his character is talented but just a tad touched.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland caught the D&D bug at an impressionable age. Once the content manager for the RPGA, and a developer for the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons rules, he is now a freelance game designer doing work for Wizards of the Coast and Paizo Publishing, and he is part of a fledgling group of game commentators and game designers called NeoGrognard. During the daylight hours, he teaches game production classes at the International Academy of Design and Technology of Seattle.

Episode 30: Theme, Plot, and World

BY JAMES WYATT

illustration by Wayne England

Have you ever noticed how I often end the column with a note about what I'm going to write about next time? The truth is, that's not there for you—it's for me. It's how I keep track of the ideas that bubble to the surface as I'm writing one month's column. When I sit down to write a new column, my first stop is always the end of the last column, to remind myself what I thought a month ago would be a good topic for next time.

Well, it turns out that last month, I was wrong. The idea bouncing around in my head–to talk about how writing my latest novel has influenced my approach to DMing–is a topic that's only worth about a thousand words, and most of them say nothing that's not self-evident. I'd be better off pointing you to page 22 of the DMG.

So instead, here's a collection of different thoughts that have been simmering in my brain as I think about my campaign and my job.

This past weekend, I ran a special make-up session of my Aquela campaign for Antalaus, Gavin, and Garel-Kai. Evan and A had missed our last session, and I promised them a chance to catch up with the rest of the group.

In the past, I have often resorted to hand-waving when players miss sessions. Characters drop in and out of the action as sessions go by and schedules conflict, and I tell myself that it doesn't really matter. Most of the DMs I play with do the same thing. Dave Noonan used to joke that the characters were there the whole time, "achieving average results."

This make-up session for these three characters gave me a good excuse not to do that. I still had to do some hand-waving, but it was in the service of a more interesting story.

I started off by catching these players up on what happened at the start of the last session. They had sailed to a village near their original destination of Haven, I explained, where they met with two NPCs. For the purpose of the story, I assumed that the missing characters had been trailing along all this time, just keeping their mouths shut. I explained how one of the NPCs urged the characters to go kill a bunch of monsters (a certain kind of monster that my son likes to refer to as "copyright violations" because I might have lifted their name and likeness from a certain popular electronic form of entertainment) in order to free the people of the nearby village to offer aid to beleaguered Haven, and the rest of the group went off to do that.

But then, I explained, this NPC held the three of them back. "You three," she said, "have a different task you must complete." She sent them to an underwater cavern where these creatures had a shrine which

housed the font of their demonic power. If the rest of the group was to be successful in their quest, these characters had to shut off that power source. "It must be the three of you who accomplish this," she said. "I have seen it."

Why? Because the creatures in question worshiped Dagon, and all three of these player characters—by coincidence, actually—had some tie to demonic forces. Antalaus was cursed after a previous visit to a shrine of Dagon (he chose the Cursed background). Gavin was actually possessed by a demon (a background he made up for himself, which I've designed some mechanics to represent). And Garel-Kai was (for reasons that are not yet clear) the target of demon-worshipping assassins in a previous side adventure I ran for him, Raine, and Valanri.

When the characters went into this underwater shrine and fought the creatures and their ixitxachitl allies, I played up the feeling of foreboding. The ixits spoke to Antalaus in Abyssal (which he understands because of his curse), warning him away lest he risk another curse. Gavin's demon started really wrestling for control. Garel-Kai felt strange energy in the place.

When they ultimately defeated the monsters, I used the opportunity to suggest some resolution for these story elements. They shattered a bunch of crystals that were channeling the Abyssal energies to the creatures above, and I told Gavin that he thought the broken crystal shards might offer him a way to bind the demon that was fighting for control of his body. I told Antalaus that he could feel the curse's grip on him loosen, and I had the shattering of the crystals open the mysterious chest he'd picked up in the first session. (The question he hasn't asked yet is *why* did disrupting these Abyssal energies open the chest that held his nifty new *skull mask*? And is wearing the mask such a good idea?)

So I think I learned something there about handling missing players—sometimes it creates an opportunity for story development and making the players who missed a session feel like they got to do something cool, not just tag along with the others, "achieving average results."

Musing about that got me thinking along a different line. That night, I posted on Twitter, "I like the storytelling possibilities in these small sessions." But as I thought about it more, I started wondering, What storytelling? Was there really a *story* going on there? What is Story?

Thesis statement: When you're creating and running a D&D campaign, the most important work is not charting out a plot or designing a richly detailed world. What's important is theme.

Corollary: When you're creating adventures or adapting published adventures for your campaign, it's less important to make them fit into some overarching plot than it is to make them fit your theme.

What is my Aquela campaign? If you asked me to pitch it in an elevator, I'd probably say something like, "A group of heroes tossed together by chance tries to navigate a world of fallen empire, magic run amok, and rising chaos, fighting demons on the one hand and aspiring tyrants on the other."

It's not a compelling pitch for a novel or a movie. If I were reading it that way, I'd want to know more. I'd want to know more about these characters: Who are they? What are their arcs, their relationships, their destinies? In the game, all of that stuff is outside my direct control, and it's not a single story. I have eight players, eight characters, and that means eight stories. That's too much for a novel or a movie. Some of them are related, but only insofar as they relate to larger themes.

I'd also want to know what *happens*—do they rebuild a new empire (or democratic society where people can live in order and safety without fear of tyranny)? Do they destroy a demon lord or primordial? Maybe eventually they'll do those things, but I haven't planned on any of them, and at least to some extent, what they end up doing depends on the characters. All I know is the kinds of threats I'm going to put them up against: demonic and elemental cultists representing the forces of Chaos, on the one hand, and evil forces for order—tyrants like the lich-queen—on the other. Which, again, is all about larger themes.

I haven't even mentioned the setting. Thirty years ago, that was the most important thing to me—what Aquela *means*. It's a water world with all these archipelagos . . . but really, it's just like the thousands of other water worlds out there. Does it have unique elements? Maybe—at least some unusual ones, like the genasi (who used to be janns) nomads who travel the seas in their tent-ships. But what's really important about the campaign and the stories we're telling within it is not the place where these stories occur but the themes that run through them.

I have even, in this incarnation of the campaign, taken steps to make the setting *less* distinct than it used to be, like using more traditional fantasy names and adopting the gods of the core D&D pantheon in place of my old pantheon. Why? Because that removes the world as a barrier to the immersion of my players.

Did you ever read a novel where the world was a barrier? Maybe you felt like you had to earn a master's degree in the history of this fictitious place to make sense of the story you were trying to read, or you had to keep referring to a glossary in the back to keep track of all the made-up names for the most mundane details of the world. "What the heck is a Quelarian

star-fruit, and why do I care? Why doesn't the hero just eat a banana?"

I've read that book, or tried to. And I've run that D&D campaign, or tried to. It turns out that my players didn't have any more interest in the campaign than I had in the novel. This time around, I'm letting the world get out of the way and concentrating on the big picture: the themes.

As I think about it now, whatever I may have said when I started, I think my campaign has two big themes and a smaller one.

Theme 1: Rising Chaos. This is basically the "Primordial Threat" theme described in the DMG (page 136), except that it covers all this: Tharizdun trying to lure the Elementals away from their alliance with Erathis, cults of Imix with the same thing in mind, widespread cults of Dagon, and the demonic activity of Miska the Wolf-Spider (a demon first introduced in the 2nd Edition AD&D adventure *Rod of Seven Parts*).

Theme 2: The Threat of Law. Like the core D&D world, Aquela is a world dotted with the ruins of empire and struggling now to find its way in the wake of the last empire's fall. One expression of that is that lots of people are trying to restore the rule of law in various forms and scales, from single towns to whole archipelagoes. Many of those people don't have the best interests of the governed at heart. The world is rife with would-be tyrants, and the greatest of those is the lich-queen, Killesti, who once ruled the archipelago with an iron-clad, bony fist and seeks to do so again.

Theme 3: The Danger of Magic. This is a sort of sub-theme running through the other two themes. The great empires of Aquela's past (by which I mean both the historical backdrop of the world in which the game takes place and also the past incarnations of the world in my previous D&D games) were magocratic, ruled by wizards. An element of that I want to play up this time is that magic is a great power, easily abused. That idea runs through both of my other themes. Chaos thrives in places where magic has been unleashed—maelstroms of elemental energy and raw chaos left behind by spells gone wrong. At the same time, many of the strongest would-be tyrants that threaten the world are wielders of magic as well, and the lich-queen's greatest tool for spreading her influence is the promulgation of magic items that carry her touch.

Did I mention that the *skull mask* in the chest was personally crafted by the lich-queen?

Those are the big themes in my campaign. Did my little side-trek adventure last weekend advance a grand, overarching plot? Not really. It advanced some character stories a bit and in some interesting ways. More importantly, it reinforced Theme 1, stressing the importance of the cult of Dagon in the game.

These themes are like design principles I can apply every time I sit down to do some work on my game. When I pick up *Tomb of Horrors* in a couple of months, as my players' characters get near 10th level, I'll consider whether I can make it fit into one or more of these themes. The most obvious approach would be to tie Acererak to the lich-queen—or get rid of my old lich-queen (I don't think I've mentioned her to my players yet) and replace her with Acererak entirely. Wow—my campaign might have just gotten that much cooler.

About the Author

James Wyatt is the Creative Manager for D&D R&D at Wizards of the Coast. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He also contributed to the *Eberron Campaign Setting* and is the author of several Dungeons & Dragons® novels set in the world of Eberron.